



J. Collyer.

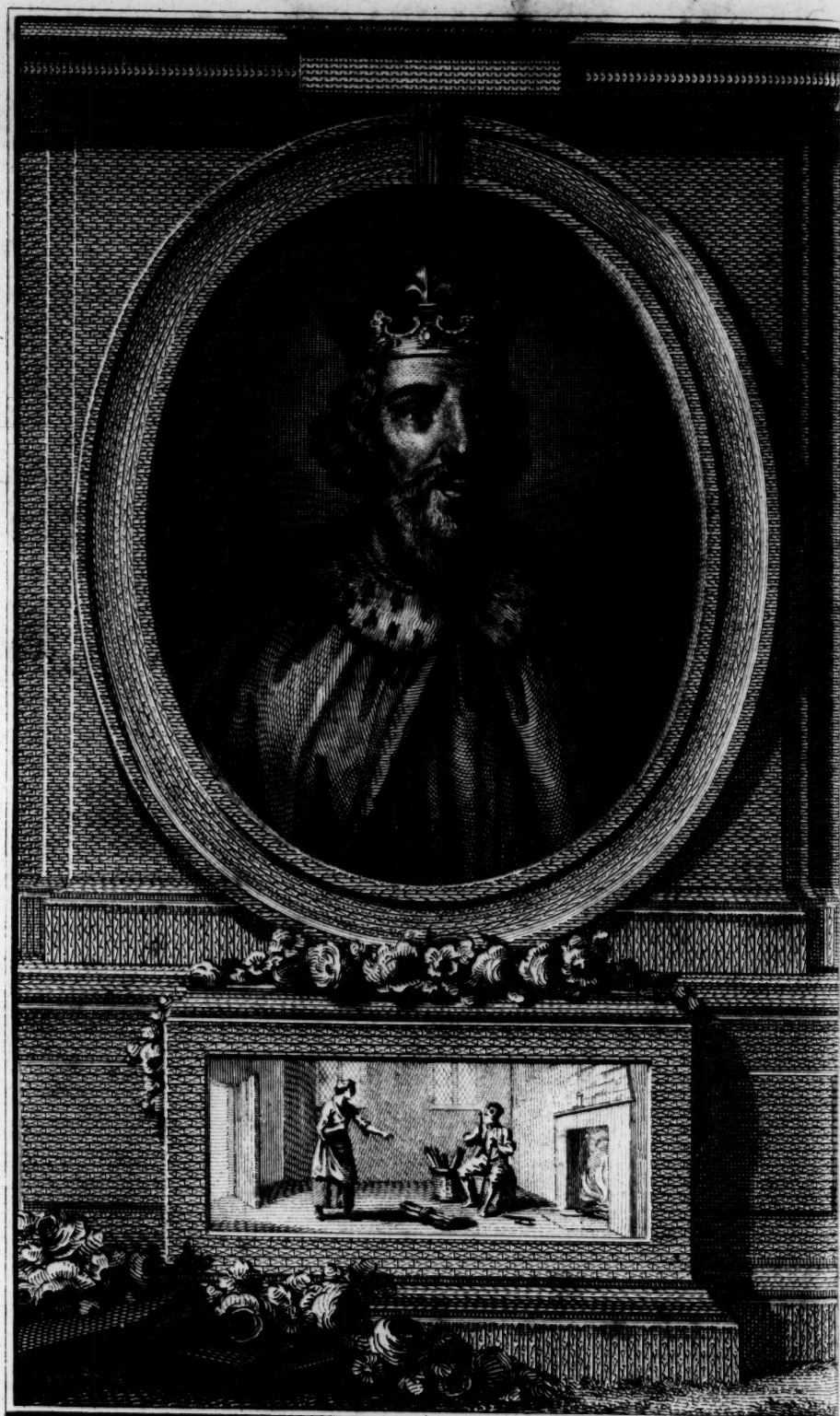
.ALFRED the GREAT.

THE
L I F E
O F
ALFRED THE GREAT,
KING OF THE ANGLO-SAXONS.

BY A. BICKNELL,
Author of the History of EDWARD THE BLACK PRINCE,
Philosophical Disquisitions on the Christian Religion, &c.

————— ALFRED!
In whom the splendor of heroic War,
And more heroic Peace, when govern'd well,
Combine; whose hallow'd name the Virtues faint,
And his own Muses love; the Best of Kings!
THOMPSON'S SEASONS.

L O N D O N:
Printed for J. BEW, N^o 28, Paternoster-row.
MDCCLXXVII.



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TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE
WILLIAM EARL MANSFIELD,
Lord Chief Justice of the Court of
King's Bench, &c. &c.

MY LORD,

TO whom can the Life of
the most judicious Law-
giver that ever flourished on this
Island be dedicated with so much
propriety, as to One by whose
Penetration and Firmness the
Laws at present in force are best
explained and supported? I have
therefore taken the liberty to
adjoin your Lordship's Name to
ALFRED's, assured that those
a 2 only

DEDICATION.

only whose Minds are clouded by the Prejudices of Party, or the Excitements of Envy, will disapprove of the union. Accept then, my Lord, this humble Testimony of your Merit. Esteem it not a servile Dedication, but a Tribute due to your great Abilities.

I have the honour to be,

MY LORD,

YOUR LORDSHIP'S

most obedient

and devoted Servant,

ALEX. BICKNELL.

THE
L I F E
O F
ALFRED THE GREAT.

INTRODUCTION.

THE same reasons that induced me to give the world a detached history of Edward the Black Prince, have prompted me to collect the most material circumstances of the life of King Alfred, and in a similar uninterrupted narrative to render them at once pleasing and instructive. As the prolixity and deviations of Mr. Collins seemed to make a more concise and regular history of the former necessary, so will the antique style and circumlocution

of Sir John Spelman, I trust, be a sufficient apology for this attempt to render the life of King Alfred more intelligible and entertaining to the generality of Readers. The following extract from his works will serve as a specimen of Sir John's manner of writing, and shew the necessity of putting him on a more modern dress; which, though it adds not to the intrinsic value of the man, will probably gain him a more ready admittance into the libraries of this politer age. The Proof I shall produce is the Proem to his Life of King Alfred, published by Mr. Hearn from the original manuscript in the Bodleian library, which thus begins:

“ If I had taken in hand to
“ have writ the particular reign of
“ any of our Kings since the full
“ growth and consistence of the
“ Crown, I should have needed no
“ more

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“ more than immediately from the
“ death of the Predecessor to have
“ pursued the actions of the Successor.
“ The general knowledge of the story
“ of those times, and the little dif-
“ ference of any of them from the
“ times immediately going before,
“ were aim enough to mind the
“ Reader what he should expect.
“ But being now to collect the life
“ of a King long since out of mind,
“ and, as I must say, the first of our
“ Kings, and consequently the birth
“ of our kingdom too ; and to relate
“ the carriage of things in an age
“ much different from the present,
“ and not particularly enough deli-
“ vered to us : it cannot be less than
“ necessary for the work itself that
“ we a little cast our eye upon the
“ condition of those times so long be-
“ fore passed : seeing that in a course
“ never so little out of the common
“ tract the apprehension is very easily
“ misled,

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“ misled, unless than by the help of
“ some light (although but small in
“ general) it be in some measure rec-
“ tify’d. Withal, the expectation of
“ the Reader would, for his own
“ satisfaction, be somewhat prepar-
“ ed, least. fancying to himself ano-
“ ther manner of frame and carriage
“ of things than indeed those times
“ could bear, he reject the know-
“ ledge of the actions then in hand ;
“ for that they were not of that na-
“ ture, nor managed in the garbe,
“ that he looked for, and so, unsa-
“ tisfy’d in his fancy, loose the be-
“ nefit his judgment might otherwise
“ perhaps have made in knowing
“ them.”

The characters of the two Princes
I have thus chosen stand conspicu-
ously foremost among those royal
names, that from the first union of
the Saxon heptarchy (the earliest pe-
riod

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riod to which we regularly trace back our list of Monarchs) have graced the English throne, or nearly allied to the possessor have assisted in supporting the dignity of it. Pre-eminently superior they claim a separate page; and having both acquired by their virtues the title of Great, deserve to be selected from the groupe of those whose high stations have solely preserved their names from oblivion; their actions from being either sanguinary and destructive, or inglorious and unimportant, scarcely meriting the notice of the Historian.

A much larger field opens upon me in the present attempt than in the former. The Prince of Wales being untimely cut off before the crown, which his royal Father had worn with so much honour to himself and glory to his subjects, descended to him, he had not an opportunity of fully exerting

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exerting those great and amiable qualities with which his breast was stored: had he been permitted by Heaven to ascend the throne of his Forefathers, there is the greatest reason to conclude from his humane and courteous disposition, and from the knowledge he had acquired in civil government and national policy, during a presidency of ten years over his principality of Aquitain, that he would have ruled the kingdom of England with a gentle hand, and have rendered his people happy: I was consequently confined to the celebration of his virtues as a Man, and of his military atchievements as a Warrior; the augmented duties of a Sovereign fulfilled with propriety were wanting to complete the character.

But in the Hero I now celebrate,
the private virtues and warlike accomplishments

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complishments of the Black Prince were combined, with the more extensive qualifications of the Lawgiver and the King. In Alfred were all these united; and, if proper allowances are made for the early period in which he lived, when, from the long divided authority of the Saxons, the art of government was yet in its infancy, and not reduced to that regular system it is at present, we may with great justice place him in the foremost rank (if not the very first) of those few Worthies that have filled the English throne with true dignity, and are remembered by posterity with respect.

Though the polity of former ages, and the regulations established by the Romans for the government of the Britons during their residence among them, were at the time this King reigned forgotten, and buried in that
barbarism

barbarism which gradually succeeded, yet the art of war was not at the same low ebb; the Saxons had brought with them no inconsiderable store of military knowledge from their native country: Germany, from whence the Saxons originally peregrinated, was never totally conquered by the Romans, as Gallia, Spain, and other countries were; their courage and skill in war must consequently be great, and their power formidable.

Alfred inherited from his Progenitors a large share of bravery, and early acquired experience in the art of war, which the frequent invasions of the Danes, during his reign, gave him continual opportunities of exerting in defence of his country: and notwithstanding an elegant and sensible Writer * has very lately asserted,

* Soame Jenyns, Esq;

that

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that valour and patriotism are not Christian virtues, yet the exertion of them in Alfred proceeded from such principles as are not incompatible with the severest precepts of Christianity. They were only exercised against an Infidel invader, and to prevent rapine, murder, and devastation. He assumed not the character of a Conqueror, nor, stimulated by ambition, and thirsting for an extension of empire, did he weep with the vanquisher of Asia that he had no other worlds to conquer; his courage was confined to the defence of his dominions, and the preservation of the lives and property of his subjects. So far must even the learned Commentator on the Christian institutes allow, that the Hero of my Work deviated very little from the narrow line he has drawn. Happy indeed would it be for the world in general, if the mild and benevolent precepts

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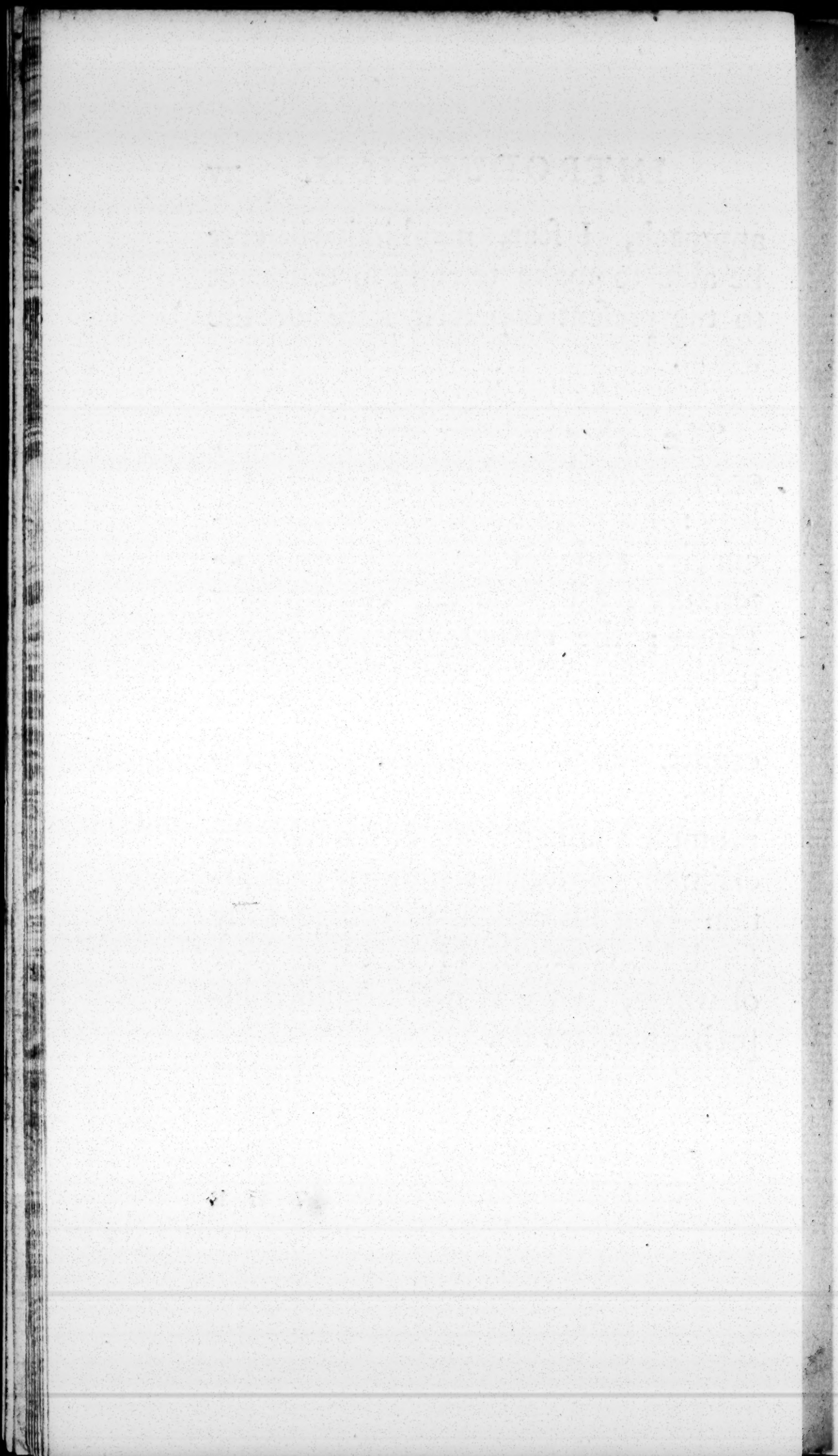
precepts of Christianity, reduced to their original and genuine simplicity, and cleared from that dross of ceremony and superstitions in which for many centuries it has been enveloped, were to become universal, and spread their benign influence through every region; then would valour and military atchievements no longer excite our praise; our swords may then be turned into plough-shares, and war and bloodshed would give place to peace and harmony. But alas! from the present constitution of things this is rather to be wished for than expected; the evils attendant on society call for an exertion of the ruder passions; the necessaries and conveniences of life must be secured from the hand of the spoiler, and force must be repelled by force. To restrain every unnecessary exertion of it, and at the same time to avoid every cause of offence, is the nearest approach,

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approach, I fear, mankind will ever be able to make to rules so dissonant to the present depraved state of the world.

The other endowments of Alfred, or his general conduct, need no apology: his private life was unexceptionable, and his acquirements in literature far beyond any cotemporary Prince: the encouragement he gave to learning, which was totally extinguished in his dominions when he ascended the throne, and the indefatigable exertion of all his powers to promote the happiness of his subjects, claim the Historian's warmest celebration— But his actions will more fully speak his worth than it is in the power of words, however nervous and comprehensive, to do.

T H E



THE
L I F E
O F
ALFRED THE GREAT.

THE Romans having totally evacuated Britain, after being in possession of it four hundred and eighty years from the landing of Julius Cæsar, the Scots and Picts took advantage of the defenceless state of the natives, and uniting in a powerful confederacy made frequent inroads into the kingdom. For some time these were only temporary and partial ; but at length they formed a regular plan of operations, and having demolished part of the wall built by the Emperor Severus to prevent their incursions, they destroyed many capital cities in the northern parts, carrying terror and desolation wherever they appeared. The Bri-

A

tons

tons now saw the necessity of putting themselves under the direction of some able Commander, flattering themselves, that when once united in the same cause, their divisions would cease, and they should by that means be the better able to resist their enemies.

The person they chose for this purpose was Vortigern, a Chieftain of the Silures, a people who inhabited part of Wales ; but though it is probable he had given proofs of his courage and experience before he was thus fixed on by the Britons, yet they found not in him the protector they expected, as all Historians agree that his conduct greatly disgusted the different nations he was called to command, and alienated their minds from him : cruel, avaricious, and addicted to many vices, he was no ways qualified to restore the confused affairs of the Britons ; especially as he had attained his present power by artifice, and the murder of his Predecessor. Apprehensive,
from

from the dissatisfaction of his people, of some unfavourable determinations, and fearful of an attack from Ambrosius, whose Father he had assassinated, Vortigern invited to his aid a body of Saxons that had just landed on the coast with an intention to plunder. But as this could not be done without the consent of the general Assembly, he consulted them on the subject, and artfully making the inroads of the Scots and Picts a pretext for so dangerous a step, gained their sanction.

The Saxons were originally inhabitants of the Cimbrian Chersonesus, now called Jutland; and about the time the Romans began their conquests in Germany, leaving their own inhospitable climes, they possessed themselves of the northern parts of that empire: the Cimbrians, on leaving their native country, divided themselves into three bodies, taking the different denominations of the Suevi, the Franks, and the Saxons; and making continual advances southward to more temperate regions, ar-

rived at length on the frontiers of the Roman dominions. The Suevi bent their course towards Italy; the Franks to the South-west, where they over-run the whole province of Gaul, and founded the kingdom of France; whilst the Saxons took possession of all those tracks of land which lie between the Rhine and the Elbe; and at the time the Britons desired their assistance, were settled in the countries now termed Westphalia, Saxony, East and West Friesland, Holland, and Zealand. The true etymology of their name is difficult to be traced; the most common opinion is, that the word Saxon comes from Seax, which in their language signifies a sword, they making use of two sorts, a long one which they wore by their sides, and another that was shorter which served for a dagger; both in the shape of a cutlass or falchion.

The body of Saxons Vortigern applied to, was commanded by two brothers, Hengist and Horfa, who readily accepted the invitation,

tation, and were as joyfully received by the British King, each having their private views. Being incorporated in the British army, and led against the northern invaders, the valiant Brothers soon distinguished themselves as allies of consequence, and having driven the enemy back to their several territories, they had the Isle of Thanet assigned them for their abode.

Hengist, who appears to be the chief in command, and to have the principal management in this expedition, had first borne arms under his Father in the Roman armies, where he had acquired a consummate knowledge and experience in the art of war: whilst he was in the North with the British army, pursuing the flying Picts, he represented to Vortigern, that the service he was employed in obliging him to be at a distance from the Isle of Thanet his proposed residence, he had no secure place to lay up in safety the booty he should take from the enemy, he therefore begged leave to build

a small fort in that part of the kingdom. To shew that his demands were not unreasonable, he only required as much land as he could cover with the hyde of an ox: he had probably heard, whilst he served in the Roman armies, of the same stratagem being used by Queen Dido when she built Carthage: this being granted by the unsuspecting King, Hengist cut the hyde, as she did, into small thongs, and inclosed with them a space large enough for his purpose, where he built a fort immediately, without giving the Britons time to oppose his design. The name of the castle, which it still retains, being Thong Caster, or the Castle of Thongs, seems to confirm this story.

But though one of the articles of the compact formed between the Britons and Saxons was, “ That the Saxons should
 “ fight against the foreign enemies of the
 “ Britons, and were to receive pay from the
 “ nation in whose favour they fought,” yet

Hengist had other views than merely subsistence; pleased with the fertility of the country, he wished to make a settlement in it: observing the weakness of the King, and the disgust which prevailed between him and his people, with the inexperience of the inhabitants, the kingdom being drained of the bravest part of them by the contests between the Roman Emperors *, he resolved to avail himself of these favourable circumstances, and to prosecute the plan he had formed. Hengist, however, found it necessary to augment his forces before he put his more extensive designs in execution; to this purpose, he secretly sent

* The Romans always employing foreign troops in their conquests, they never suffered the Britons to exercise themselves in arms till they were incorporated with their own forces; for which reason the levies that were raised in Briton were sent into other provinces, from whence they never returned. These levies were so numerous, that there were twelve considerable bodies of Britons then in the Roman armies; besides which, Maximus and Constantine had almost drained the island of every man that could bear arms: it is therefore no wonder that they became an easy prey to their enemies.

intelligence to his countrymen of the pleasing prospect which presented itself, and invited them to share it with him. The Saxon dominions being overstocked with inhabitants, the intelligence was received with great joy, and seventeen large ships immediately fitted out to convey as many as they would contain to the promised land: these arrived safe, and assisted in completing the scheme the Saxon General had formed; but they brought with them a charm of greater efficacy, and which contributed more to the completion of it than this accumulation of their numbers; they brought with them Rowena, the beautiful Daughter of Hengist, who was born to enslave the British King, and with him the whole nation. Her Father soon after her arrival inviting Vortigern to a feast, he ordered his Daughter, who was richly arrayed for the purpose, to present his royal guest with some wine; this she did in so graceful a manner, that the King became enamoured with her beauty, and after repudiating his

Wife,

Wife, with the consent of Hengist married her *. Blinded by his passion, and without considering the pernicious consequences that might result from his generosity, he immediately put the Saxons in possession of the county of Kent, from whence, by degrees, they spread themselves throughout the whole kingdom.

Such was the introduction of this people into the island; nor was it in the power of the Britons ever after to expel them; and their numbers daily increasing, they at length became numerous enough to form seven different kingdoms, known by the denomination of the Heptarchy. The Britons now experienced the fatal effects of calling foreign mercenaries to their assistance, who

* Some modern Writers have questioned the truth of this story, though all the old Historians unanimously give it. As it is impossible at this distance of time to authenticate every event, I shall not take off my Reader's attention by unnecessary disquisitions, but insert, without disputing their authenticity, every historical fact that appears worthy of credit.

feldom

seldom confine themselves to the letter of a treaty : as interest is the sole motive of their interference, their demands are continually increasing, till their avarice becomes insatiable ; and as only the weak require their aid, they seldom have it in their power to prevent these repeated exactions. The attempts of an open and avowed enemy may be repelled, or by some means or other warded off, but the secret designs of mercenary auxiliaries, as they are carried on under the mask of friendship, are frequently more dangerous and destructive. The natives, naturally brave, continued for many years to exert all their power for the recovery of their independence, but these struggles were not crowned with success ; the fresh swarms of Saxons which every favourable wind brought over, increased their numbers to such a degree, that the Britons were at length overpowered, and obliged to retreat to the strong holds and inaccessible mountains of Wales or Cornwall.

Ambrosius

Ambrosius Aurelianus and King Arthur were the only British Chiefs that were able to make head against them. The former of these Princes was descended from a noble Roman family, being Son of Honorius, who was supposed to have been put to death by Vortigern. On the election of Vortigern to the command of the British forces, a powerful party declared in favour of the young Prince; but being unsuccessful, and fearing the revengeful disposition of the new Monarch, he retired to the court of Aldroen, King of Armorica, his relation: he remained there till dissensions having arisen between the Danes and Vortigern, notwithstanding the obligations they lay under to that King, the British forces were defeated in several battles. The natives being reduced to great distress by the ravages of Hengist, they applied to the King of Armorica for assistance, who sent them over a body of forces under the command of Ambrosius. For several years did this Prince bravely oppose not only the Saxons, but

Vortigern

Vortigern and his Son Vortimer, who, instead of uniting with him to drive out their mutual foes, formed a party against him, and endeavoured to frustrate all his designs : but Vortimer being poisoned by Rowena, his Mother-in-law, at the request of Hengist, a great part of the Britons who sided with Vortigern being cut off by the treachery * of the Danish General, and the
King

* Hengist, after a temporary accommodation had taken place, having lulled Vortigern and his adherents, by professions of friendship, into perfect security, he proposed to keep up the good understanding between the two nations by establishing mutual interviews, which were to be enlivened by sports and pastimes. Vortigern, who was a passionate lover of diversions, joyfully accepted his proposal, and paid him the first visit, accompanied by three hundred of his principal subjects. Hengist received them with apparent respect and cordiality, gave them a splendid entertainment, and omitted nothing that could divert them : but towards the end of the feast the scene was changed ; a subject of dispute was artfully introduced, which, being worked up into a quarrel, on a signal given a body of troops rushed in, and put all the British Lords to the sword : Vortigern alone was spared ; Hengist having need of him in carrying on his designs against the kingdom, he was only made a prisoner. Am-
brosius

King himself taken prisoner by him, Ambrosius became sole Monarch of Britain, and assumed the imperial purple after the manner of the Roman Emperors. During his whole life he continued to oppose the Saxons, and gained many victories over them, yet he could not prevent the gradual increase of their power.

After the death of Ambrosius, the Saxons being grown very formidable, and committing great devastations, Arthur was particularly chosen by the British Nobles, and crowned at their request, though only eighteen years of age, to take upon him the command of an army intended to march against their invaders. Though the existence of this King has been doubted by Milton and some others, yet that he reigned, and performed many martial deeds in defence of his country, is a part of his-

ambrosius is said to have built Stonehenge near Salisbury in memory of this massacre; and lies buried himself near it, at a place which after him is termed Ambresbury.

tory

tory entitled to as much credit as the invasion of the Romans, or the settlement of the Saxons. It is true, that these warlike actions have been decorated by some Writers with so many marvellous circumstances, which make them favour so much of romance, that they come in a questionable shape; but as the dates and many particulars are given in the most exact manner, I shall suppose them genuine; and after having stripped his history of its false trappings, make it a part of my work.

He was born in the year 501, and though his immediate ancestors are not with certainty known, yet there is great reason to believe he was of royal extraction. Saint David, the patron of Wales, who was himself descended from Brachin, a British King, was his Uncle; and he is also said to be nearly related to Ambrosius, by whom he was early initiated in the art of war. His great character for generosity, prudence, and personal bravery, which procured him
this

this honourable distinction, brought to his standard great numbers of his dispersed countrymen; and his successes against the Saxons answered the most sanguine expectations of his subjects: in twelve battles did victory crown his arms, but the Saxons had already fixed themselves too deeply in the island to be rooted out; their numbers and military discipline withstood all the efforts of Arthur and his brave companions. Cerdick, the most famous of the Saxon Generals after Hengist, was his opponent; and it appears, that notwithstanding the British hero gained so many battles, yet he was not always victorious; his yielding up the counties now termed Somerset and Southampton, and which gave his enemies such easy opportunities of increasing their dominions, is a convincing proof that Fortune did not constantly favour him. He did however what man could do against so manifest a superiority, and his name has been ever held in the highest veneration by the descendents of the antient Britons.

During

During an interval of peace he made a voyage to Jerufalem, which has furnifhed the writers of romance with an additional opportunity of imputing to him fuch romantic deeds, as have made even his exiftence doubted.

Although the firft part of this Prince's life was fuccefsful, yet domeftic feuds rendered his more advanced age unhappy, and put an end to his life in the prime of manhood *, which otherwife would probably have been facrificed in a nobler caufe, the defence of his country. His Wives, of whom he had three, named Gwinever, were the perfons that interrupted his happinefs. The firft was carried off by Melvas, King of Somerfet ; but Arthur finding out her

* Rapin fays that Arthur fucceeded his Father Gorlous in the kingdom of Danmonium, now the counties of Cornwall and Devon ; and placing the commencement of his reign in the year 467, makes him live to the age of ninety : but as it is at this diftance of time impoffible to reconcile thefe differences, and moft Hiftorians fix the time of his birth in the year 501, I have chofen to follow their accounts.

retreat,

retreat, and advancing with an army to invest the fortrefs in which ſhe was detained, the Lady was reſtored. His ſecond Wife appears to have been buried at Glaſtonbury, the place where Arthur was himſelf interred. The third proved the cauſe of his death; for during his abſence in the northern parts of Britain, where he made war againſt the Saxons, having left his dominions to the government of Mordred his Nephew, that Prince, unfaithful to his truſt, took poſſeſſion of the throne, and at the ſame time, deaf to the remonſtrances of gratitude or honour, ſeduced his Uncle's Wife. No ſooner was the heart-rending intelligence conveyed to Arthur, than he relinquished the conqueſts he had made, and haſtily marched back to guard againſt a blow ſo fatal to his peace: he found his ungenerous Kinfman prepared to defend the crown he had uſurped, and it was not till after ſeveral con- teſts that he could diſpoſſeſs him of it: at laſt he ſlew him with his own hand in a battle fought near Camlan, now Camelford

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in Cornwall, in the year 542; but he reaped not the fruits of his victory, for at the same instant he received a wound which put an end to his life.

Thus fell a Prince whose character, divested of all the romantic ornaments with which Writers born in an age of chivalry have chosen to adorn it, will ever grace the annals of this island, and meet with respect from every admirer of valour and magnanimity.

He is supposed to have been the first founder of any order of Knighthood in this kingdom, there appearing to be many concurrent circumstances to confirm the institution of the order of the Round Table, as a reward for the courage of his brave companions.

From a seal found at Westminster, there is no doubt but that he assumed the title of Emperor, as Ambrosius had done before him

him. The inscription on it was, *Patr. Arturius, Brittan. Gall. Germ. Dac. Imp.* that is, *Patricius Arturius, Britannicus, Gallicus, Germanicus, Dacicus, Imperator.* These proud titles were perhaps the occasion of so many victories in foreign countries being attributed to him, though they may undoubtedly be allowed him with great justice; for he might be called Britannicus, from his being Monarch of the Britons; the surname of Germanicus might be given him from his defeating so often the Saxons who came from Germany; and his being stiled Dacicus, might be founded on his victories over the Jutes, who were mixed with the Saxons, and generally confounded with the Dacians.

Whilst the concerns of the Britons yet engage our attention, a short account of the Druids their Priests may not be ill-timed, or considered as foreign to the present work. They were stiled Druids from *Deru* the Celtic, or *Dryw* the British word,

for an oak ; and were distinguished by that name, from choosing the places of their habitation and worship among groves and oaks, for which they had an idolatrous affection. To them were committed not only the ceremonies of their religion, but also the administration of civil judicature and the education of their Princes : this however was in subordination to a chief Druid, who greatly excelled in dignity all the rest ; this chief, styled the Arch-Druid, was elected from among the others, and enjoyed his supremacy for life : his person was held inviolable ; and by his elevated station he was enabled to controul even the actions of Kings, having sufficient authority either to elect or depose the British Sovereigns as he pleased.

Being the only depositories of learning, the Druids took every measure to restrain it within their fraternity ; and though at first it was an act of necessity, as the use of letters was unknown to them, they afterwards
determined

determined by choice that none of their institutes should be committed to writing: hence they drew unto themselves an infinite number of disciples, whom they generally kept for twenty years under their tuition; and as most of these were persons of the first quality, it was the means of rendering themselves more respectable to the people, and more necessary to the state,

They taught their pupils the nature of the Gods, the immortality of the soul, and other subjects that contributed to render them heroes, and to make them despise death: they believed one supreme Deity immense and infinite, and thought that confining his worship to a particular place was inconsistent with the belief of those attributes; but they corrupted this doctrine by admitting an inferior kind of deities, whom they also adored, offering up to them prayers, oblations, and sacrifices: their oblations consisted at first of fine flour sprinkled with salt, or a cake seasoned in the

same manner ; but when, by their intercourse with the Phenicians who traded to this island for tin, they lost this simplicity, they adopted in its stead the barbarous custom of sacrificing human victims ; and improving on the cruelty of other nations, used them for divination with the most horrid circumstances. Steeled by these practices, they at last grew deaf to the whispers of Humanity, and carried their savageness to so high a pitch, that they formed wicker idols of such a prodigious size as to contain great crowds of people, whom they burned together in this inclosure. When they first adopted this mode, only malefactors were the object of their barbarity ; but in process of time, innocent people became the victims of their superstition. The places set apart for these sacrifices and other ceremonies of their divine worship, were consecrated groves ; the fences which inclosed these were made of oak, their altars strewed with its leaves and encircled with its branches, the brows of the victims and the heads of
their

their votaries being crowned with chaplets of the same.

They believed there was a profound mystery contained in the *mistletoe*, and esteemed it as the choicest gift of Heaven : they imagined the tree on which it grew to be eminently favoured by the Deity, and had on that account a peculiar claim to their veneration. It was sought for annually on their new-year's day, and when discovered, was hailed with inconceivable raptures of joy : the chief Druid, clad in white, ascended the tree amidst an infinite concourse of people, and with a consecrated golden knife or pruning-hook cropped the sacred branch, which he received into his white robe and presented to the view of the enraptured multitude ; after which they offered two white bulls as a testimony of their gratitude.

In their religious exercises they made use of hymns, which were sung in concert accompanied with the music of harps ; and on

their grand festivals this was attended with dancing, feasting, and public games: these hymns were at first composed by the Druids, but in process of time became the employment of the Bards, an inferior order, who were the preservers of the memory and achievements of their heroes.

The Druids wore their hair short and their beards very long; they generally bore in their hands a wand, and had a kind of ornament hung about their necks encased in gold, and called a Druid's egg. When employed in their religious ceremonies they always wore long white vestments, but at other times, such as held any honourable post had coloured garments brocaded with gold. Women were admitted as members of this society, several Ladies of the first rank being educated by the Druids, and some of them became as celebrated for their learning as their beauty.

During

During the time this kingdom was possessed by the Romans, the Druids often felt the destructive sword of those invaders; as they excited their countrymen to make a brave resistance, they were the peculiar objects of their enemies resentment: at length Suetonius the Roman General having penetrated into the Isle of Mona, now the Island of Anglesea, the principal seminary of their order, he cut down and destroyed their sacred groves, and burnt the Druids themselves on their own altars, with a fury which shewed his intention was utterly to extirpate them: but in this he did not succeed, for there being many of their order still dispersed throughout the kingdom, they returned, after his retreat, from the different places where they were situated, to their favourite island, began to rebuild their altars, and to re-establish their affairs; till Agricola, some years after, finding they were the chief obstruction to his conquests, determined to complete the work Suetonius had left unfinished on account of Boadicea's insurrection:

furrection : he accordingly landed on the
 island, and having conquered the British
 troops that opposed him, entirely destroyed
 all remains of their temples, groves, and
 other places of worship : those of the Druids
 who could escape, fled to Ireland, to the Isle
 of Man, and to Scotland or the Scottish
 Islands, where they remained for several
 centuries. When Christianity reached these
 retreats they were obliged to make a further
 remove, and after spreading through Nor-
 way, Denmark, and other northern coun-
 tries, they were at last entirely extinguished.

After the death of Arthur, the bravest
 and most experienced Warriors among the
 Britons strove but in vain to support their
 expiring freedom : the Saxons found means
 to enlarge their territories, till at length
 they became masters of the whole country.
 For more than three hundred years the
 Saxon government continued divided into
 seven branches, each division having a se-
 parate King ; till being grown unweildy,
 the

the weight of the empire sometimes pondering in favour of one kingdom, sometimes in another, according to the abilities of the Prince who happened to fill the throne, the power at length became united in the person of Egbert, King of the West-Saxons, who was the first Monarch of all England.

The Anglo-Saxon heptarchy consisted of the kingdoms of Kent, of Suffex or the South Saxons, of Wesssex or the West Saxons, of Mercia, of Northumberland, and of Essex. The conquests made by the two Saxon Leaders in Britain not only drew over fresh bodies of men to recruit their forces, and people the countries already subdued, but they tempted other Chiefs to engage in like adventures. The Angles, a neighbouring people, excited by the same desire, came over soon after the Saxons and fixed themselves on the coast, from the mouth of the river Humber to that of the Thames, founding the kingdom of the East-Angles, which made the seventh, and
was

was esteemed one of the heptarchy, as they always acted in conjunction with the Saxons.

The period during which these separate states existed, furnished very few events that are worth recording; I shall therefore briefly pass it over, selecting only a few of the most remarkable.

The Saxons were as yet pagans, worshipping idols, the chief of which were Tuisco, Woden, Thor, Friga or Fræa, and Seater; besides whom they adored the Sun and Moon. Tuisco is said to have been the Grandson of Japhet, and to have first peopled the north of Europe; and the name of Teutch, which the Germans still give themselves, is apparently derived from their Progenitor. The God Thor, from whence the word Thunderer, was esteemed by them with the same degree of veneration with Jupiter among the Romans, and both styled the Thunderer. Woden was their God of War, because under his conduct the first Saxons

Saxons issued from their native country the Chersonesus, and made large conquests for their settlement: their principal families look up to him as their founder, and gloried in being descended from him. Friga, the Wife of Woden, was the Venus of that people.

Continually involved in the hurry and tumults of war, they had no leisure to examine into the truths of Christianity; nor was it till about the year 590 when Etherbert, King of Kent, espoused Bertha, Daughter of Cheribert, King of Paris, who was a Christian, that their conversion first began. By an article of the marriage this Lady was allowed the free exercise of her religion; in consequence of which she was attended from her native country by Luidhard, Bishop of Soissons, a Prelate venerable both for his learning and his piety: he officiated in the church dedicated to St. Martin, which was built in the time of the Romans near the walls of Canterbury, and, by his frequent discourses with the Nobility,

brought over several persons even in the King's palace to his religion : the King himself at length conceived a favourable opinion of it, to which the Queen's exemplary life and uncommon learning chiefly contributed. As this Lady was not only pious but zealous, she endeavoured to propagate her religious tenets through the whole kingdom, and more than once sent to France for persons fit to undertake so important a commission.

The Christian religion had by this time spread itself over the greatest part of Europe, and seemed to have received new lustre from the attempts made to extinguish it : neither the persecutions of the Roman Emperors, the divisions which had arisen between the churches of Constantinople and Rome, nor the superstitions, ceremonies, and pageantry with which it was now loaded, could deface its divine image, or prevent the excellency of its precepts from carrying conviction with them wherever they were propagated.

It

It is probable the Gospel was preached to native Britons at a very early period ; some Authors say by St. Paul himself, others by Joseph of Arimathea, who founded the first Christian church at Glastonbury : yet it may be presumed that the Christian Faith did not take any deep root in the island for some years, since a British King named Lucius sent Embassadors to Pope Eleutherus, the twelfth Bishop of Rome, to desire him to send over some Missionaries to instruct him in the Christian Religion, which he would not have done had there been any church established in Britain, or even any considerable number of persons of that persuasion. The first martyr was St. Alban, who had been converted at Verulam by a priest to whom he had afforded shelter, and from that Saint the town afterwards received the name which it still retains.

Gregory the Great, who now filled the papal chair, hearing of the general disposition of the Saxons to receive the Christian

Religion, dispatched Augustine with some other Monks from Rome to hasten their conversion. On his arrival the Missionary sent one of his interpreters to King Ethelbert, to inform him that he was come into his dominions to bring him a message of the greatest importance, and to instruct him in the means of procuring him everlasting happiness. After a few days the King went in person to the Isle of Thanet where they had landed, to hear them explain the purport of their message; but from a persuasion that whilst he kept himself without doors no spells could have any effect upon him, he chose to give them audience in the open air. When summoned to appear, the Monks advanced with a slow pace, bearing a silver crucifix and singing their litanies, which confirmed Ethelbert in his opinion that they dealt in enchantments: however he heard them preach, but excused himself from becoming a profelyte to their doctrine, till he had weighed its evidences more maturely.

As

As the answer he returned to Augustine after his harangue contains such proofs of good sense and moderation as would have graced a more refined age, or the most rational religion, I shall transcribe the whole of it: “ Your proposals are noble, and your
 “ promises inviting, but I cannot resolve
 “ upon quitting hastily the religion of my
 “ Ancestors, for one that appears to me
 “ supported only by the testimony of per-
 “ sons that are entire strangers: however,
 “ since, as I perceive, you have undertaken
 “ so long a journey on purpose to impart to
 “ us what you deem most important and va-
 “ luable, you shall not be sent away with-
 “ out some satisfaction; I will take care that
 “ you are treated civilly in my dominions,
 “ and supplied with all things necessary and
 “ convenient; and if any of my subjects,
 “ convinced by what you shall say to them,
 “ desire to embrace your religion, I shall not
 “ oppose it.”

C

Agreeable

Agreeable to this declaration of Ethelbert, Christ-church in Canterbury, which had been built by the Britons, was made a cathedral, and has from that time remained the metropolitan church of all England: other churches which had fallen into decay were repaired, the Heathen temples were consecrated and set apart for divine worship, and a seminary for learning was opened in that city. The conduct of these Missionaries breathed so much innocence, piety, and austerity, that it co-operated with their doctrine in encreasing the number of their proselytes; and it was not long before King Ethelbert himself, unable to withstand the double influence of their lives and arguments, declared himself their convert; the whole nation following by degrees his example.

Notwithstanding this general conversion of the Saxons, they seemed to attend so little to the fundamental principles of their new religion, that during the continuance

of the heptarchy nothing but intestine broils, and perpetual bloody contests between the different Sovereigns, present themselves to the enquirer's view: a few instances will serve as a specimen, and fully satisfy the most curious reader.

Among a variety of Princes that had ruled over the kingdom of Wessex was Kentwin, who by his bravery and conduct greatly reduced the Britons that opposed him under the command of the great Cadwallader, and drove them to the western shore. Towards the latter end of his reign he admitted Ceadwalla, his Kinsman and intended Successor, to a share of the government; but this step being opposed by the principal Nobles, Ceadwalla was compelled to take refuge in the forest of Andredswald in Suffex. In this retirement he was joined by such numbers of the military part of the nation, who respected him for his personal courage, that he soon found himself in a

condition either to recover his kingdom, or to make conquests in other parts.

The forces he had with him giving Adelwalch the King of Suffex a suspicion, that he designed to recover some territories which formerly belonged to the kingdom of Wessex, but which were now in his possession, he assembled a body of troops to expell Ceadwalla from his dominions. A battle ensued in which Adelwalch lost his life, and two of his children falling into the hands of the Conqueror, he ordered them to be put to death to extinguish the royal family of the South-Saxons. Ceadwalla lay dangerously ill of the wounds he had received in the late battle at the very time he gave these cruel orders: an Abbot who attended him pressed him to revoke this sentence; but neither his persuasions, nor the deplorable condition of the unoffending infants, could make any impression on Ceadwalla's obdurate heart, he would grant no longer respite than was necessary for their
being

being baptized, when the horrid deed was executed. Flushed with this victory, he endeavoured to make himself master of the kingdom of Suffex, but was prevented by Berthun and Authun, two Generals of Adelwalch, who since that King's death had been declared joint Monarchs of the South-Saxons.

Kentwin dying in the mean time, Ceadwalla returned to the capital of Wesslex, and being now at the head of a formidable army, was elected King without any further opposition. He then returned into Suffex at the head of a greater force, with which he defeated Berthun, and afterwards over-run the country, committing the most horrid devastations: he next invaded Kent, laying it waste in the same manner; and then attacked the Isle of Wight, which was governed by Arwalt the Brother of Authun; who finding it impossible to resist such a formidable enemy, was forced to retire and leave the inhabitants to the discretion of the

Conqueror. Ceadwalla, insensible to every merciful excitation, knew not how to restrain his cruelty ; being apprehensive that those he had conquered would take the first opportunity to free themselves from his yoke, he formed the execrable scheme of totally extirpating them : he cloaked his barbarity under the pretext of zeal for religion, and pretended he put them to death because they were idolaters ; nor would he have spared one of any age or sex, had not Wilfrid, Bishop of Selfey, begged he would consign them to his care that he might convert them : this interposition of the Bishop stopped his hand, but not before he had slain all the inhabitants except two hundred families.

Notwithstanding the concern this inhuman wretch expressed for the Christian religion, yet he had never been baptized, (and was but in part a Christian ; but some munificent gifts to the church were thought a sufficient atonement for this barbarity, and they chose
to

to acknowledge for a convert a person whom they had found so liberal a benefactor. Ceadwalla however could not find leisure to attend to his spiritual concerns till the latter part of his life, when he set off for Rome, resolved to be baptized by the Pope himself; and on his arrival was christened by Sergius the Second, who gave him the name of Peter. He survived not this ceremony many weeks, but died at Rome and was buried in St. Peter's church, where his tomb is still to be seen.

After having given this specimen of the unpolished manners and barbarous dispositions of the Saxon Monarchs during the heptarchy, and of the bloody contests they were frequently engaged in, which were nearly similar throughout the whole island, impartiality obliges me to exhibit a contrary character; of which stamp it is to be lamented among such an innumerable host of Kings there are but very few.

Ceadwalla on his departure from Britain, although he had two Sons, had resigned his crown to his Cousin Ina; as his Children were in their minority he thought this step necessary to secure to them their lives, and a probability of a future succession to his throne: he knew too well that they were liable to fall a prey to the ambitious views of a Regent, who, if he did not rob them of their kingdom, might make their infancy a pretext for carrying on measures pernicious to the state; he therefore prudently seated his Kinsman on the throne, and recommended his Children to his care.

Ina was one of the most illustrious Kings mentioned in the list of Saxon Monarchs; formed both for the field and the council, he was great as a General and a Law-giver: his successes in war are a proof of the one, and his excellent administration in peace no less a testimony of the other. His moderation, prudence, and religion were as conspicuous as his courage, but even the most
perfect

perfect characters have an alloy; his devotion, from being inflamed too high by monkish Counsellors and an enthusiastic Wife, degenerated into superstition and bigotry.

In less than a year after he mounted the throne of Wessex he was declared Monarch of the Anglo-Saxons, a plain indication that his abilities were conspicuous and his character well established. It has been observed before that the different Kings presided in the general assembly of the heptarchy, according to their abilities or power, without being able to transfer this supremacy to their descendents. The first act of royal authority he exerted after his elevation was, to compose a body of laws, called West-Saxon Leaga, or West-Saxon Laws, which served for the foundation of those enacted in the next century by one of his Successors, the Hero of this history; and at the same time he convoked a general assembly

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sembly of the Clergy, in which the concerns of the church were regulated.

If his piety was remarkable, his friendship was not less singular, as he never could forgive an injury done either to a friend, a relation, or a benefactor. It was owing to this that as soon as he had settled the affairs of his kingdom he marched into Kent, in order to take more ample revenge for the death of Mollo. This Prince, who was Brother to Ceadwalla, having attended that King on his expedition into Kent, as he commanded a small detached party met with a repulse; being obliged to retire for safety into a house with twelve of his companions, he defended himself for some time against the enemy with incredible bravery, till the Kentish men, unable to dislodge him, set fire to the building, and he, together with his gallant friends, perished in the flames. His Brother, who loved him with more than fraternal affection, was so exasperated at this catastrophe, that he re-entered

Kent

Kent at the head of a more powerful army, and, fired with revenge, wasted, destroyed, and burnt every thing which fell into his hands. Ina, not satisfied with the vengeance his Predecessor had taken on that kingdom for the murder of his Kinsman, entered it likewise with a formidable force ; but Withred, who was then the reigning Monarch, fond of the sweets of peace, bought off his resentment with a large sum of money, as a fine for the death of his Cousin.

During his reign he had many engagements with his restless neighbours, in most of which he was successful ; but though these magnified him in the eyes of his people and gained him their love, yet his enthusiastic turn of mind led him to leave this enviable situation, and make a sacrifice of his regal state in order to dedicate himself entirely to the exercises of devotion. Before he put this project into execution he made a journey to Rome, in order to confer with Pope Gregory the Second on his intended retirement.

ment. During his residence in that city he erected the English college for the reception of ecclesiastics, and the entertainment of such Kings as might be possessed with a desire of visiting the tombs of the Apostles. For the support of this seminary and the church adjacent he assigned a fund called since Peter's pence, which, though at first accepted as a gift, was in time claimed by the Popes as a debt, and a legal part of their revenues. In order to establish this fund, he returned once more to his native country ; and that being done, he resigned his crown to Ethelbald, one of the Sons of Ceadwalla, retiring again with his Queen to Rome, where he assumed the habit of a Monk, as she did that of a Nun.

Sigebert, a descendent of Ina, reigned after the death of Ethelbald, but inherited not his Predecessor's great qualities ; young, headstrong, and violent, proud of the merit of his Ancestors but deficient in their virtues, haughty without dignity,
and

and cruel without provocation, it is not to be wondered at if he was hated by his subjects. Having murdered one of his principal courtiers through wantonness, and continuing to treat his people with inhumanity as well as his Nobles with insolence, they drove him from the throne, and substituted Keneulph, a Prince of the same family, in his place.

The new Monarch having dispossessed Sigebert of all his dominions excepting Hampshire, at that time governed by Earl Cumbran, he there found a safe retreat, and what was more for his true interest, a person in the Earl who was faithful to him in his misfortunes. That Nobleman knowing that the young King's disgrace had arisen from his imprudence and vices, endeavoured to reclaim him from them, and to point out to him a mode of behaviour by which he might probably regain the affections of his subjects. But this noble proof of friendship, instead of exciting the gratitude
of

of Sigebert provoked his anger, and was by him esteemed such a flagrant act of disrespect, that he ordered him to be put to death. The fate of a person who suffered only on account of his loyalty, had such an effect on those who yet followed the exiled King, that they unanimously deserted him, and suffered him to be driven out of Hampshire; after which he fled for shelter into the wilds of Andredswald, where he was killed by a swineherd who belonged to Cumbran, in revenge for his Master's murder.

Keneulph, raised to the throne in the manner just described, employed his arms against the Cornish Britons, whom he defeated in several engagements: he had a genius naturally turned to war, and in the first part of his reign was very successful; but in the latter part Fortune deserted him, and he lost all his dominions north of the Thames, by the victorious arms of Offa, King of Mercia.

Kynehard,

Kynehard, the Brother of Sigebert, taking advantage of his ill-success, endeavoured to dispossess him of the remainder, but not succeeding was forced to fly into exile; he however kept hovering on the borders of the kingdom with a few attendants, in order to take the first opportunity of revenging himself on Keneulph. Being informed that the King often visited a Lady at Morton in Surry, he surprized him there, and having invested the house with his men, got to the apartment where he was, before his attendants could receive the alarm. Keneulph ran hastily to his arms and defended the door with the greatest bravery, till perceiving Kynehard among the assassins, he was so enraged as to pay no regard to his own safety; falling out amidst his enemies he wounded the traitor, but at length fell, overpowered by numbers. The King's attendants, alarmed at the noise, ran to the place where their royal Master lay dead, and attempted to revenge his death: Kynehard endeavoured by promises to bring them

over to his party, but persisting in their loyalty, they were all slain by the conspirators.

The Nobility at Kingston hearing of their King's fate, early the next morning reached Morton, where they found that the Regicides had strongly barricaded the house with an intention to defend themselves. Kynehard endeavoured to divert them also from their design by considerable offers, and at the same time gave them to understand that there were several of their nearest relations within, who were resolved to sacrifice their lives in his defence. Earl Ofric, the chief of the Noblemen, replied, That they had no relation so dear to them as their Lord, and therefore they would never obey his murderers ; but that such of them as would desert Kynehard should be at liberty to depart in safety. This declaration having no effect, Kynehard and his adherents, after an obstinate defence, were cut to pieces.

Having

Having thus revenged the murder of their Sovereign, and performed his funeral obsequies at Winchester, they crowned Brightric, a descendent of Cerdic * the founder of the Kingdom of Wesssex, but not by the eldest line: this King, though of a meek and pacific disposition, could not help entertaining suspicions of Egbert, a Prince of the blood, who had been educated by some of the chief of the Nobles, and was at that time remarkably popular. To strengthen himself in the possession of the

* This warlike Prince, who was lineally descended from Woden, having acquired great reputation in Germany, and finding there no room for further conquests, resolved to seek his fortune in Britain, where he knew many of his own nation had already established themselves: with this view he equipped five vessels, and, attended by a considerable force, landed at Yarmouth soon after the death of Hengist. Notwithstanding he was several times defeated by King Arthur, he maintained his ground, and became famous for founding the kingdom of Wesssex, to which all the others were at last united; and for being the head of the royal family of England, the male line of which continued uninterrupted to Edward the Confessor, and afterwards by the female, it has been extended to the present time.

D

throne,

throne, Brightric espoused Eadburga the Daughter of Offa, King of Mercia; and as another necessary step, removed Egbert from his presence. The young Prince perceiving the jealous eye with which he was beheld, and the dangers to which he was consequently exposed, fled to the court of Offa, but was received coldly by him on account of the match which had taken place between Brightric and his Daughter. Thus deprived of all hopes of refuge in England, he went over to France, where he found the protection he wanted, from a Monarch whose court was famous for its politeness, grandeur, and virtue. Charles the Great then reigned over France, and was esteemed one of the greatest and wisest Sovereigns of the age. Under the eye of this Prince Egbert improved himself in all useful knowledge; he particularly applied himself to the study of military discipline, and became master of all those accomplishments which enabled him afterwards to unite the different kingdoms of the heptarchy in one,

and

and rendered him the greatest King that England had yet produced.

Eadburga, the Wife of Brightric, was wanton, false, insolent, and cruel ; perpetually at variance with the Nobility, whom she frequently accused of fictitious crimes to her Husband, in order to have them put to death under cover of the law ; and when the King was too wise to be made the instrument of her malice, she always found means to take them off by poison. A young Nobleman whom Brightric greatly esteemed, having given her some offence, she was resolved to dispatch him ; but not being able to find out any crime to accuse him of with a probability of success, she had recourse to the poisoned cup, which her Husband tasting of by accident, he fell a victim, though undesignedly, to her wickedness. Having made herself by this act too odious to stay in England, she fled to France, where Charlemagne, out of respect to her Father Offa, gave her a rich abbey ; but being de-

ted there of incontinence with an English Nobleman, she was expelled: after this she wandered about from place to place in great want, and ended her distresses by a natural death at Pavia in Italy.

It is related of this Princess, that on her arrival in France she made the Emperor several rich presents; and he asking her one day, Which of the two she would chose for a husband, if both himself and Son were offered? She foolishly replied, That she should prefer his Son: on which that Prince told her with a smile, That if she had chosen him she should have had his Son, but as she had given the preference to his Son, she should have neither.

The West-Saxons were struck with such detestation of her crime, that before they proceeded to the election of a new King, they made a law whereby the Wives of their future Sovereigns were forbid to assume the title of Queen, on pain of their Husbands being

being deprived of their power, and their subjects being absolved from their oath of allegiance. As soon as this step was taken, Egbert, who was then at Rome with Charlemagne, was invited by the Nobility to accept of the crown.

It cannot be supposed but that among so great a number of Kings as reigned in England during its division into separate states, there were many who would claim our notice, and deserve to have their actions particularized; Edwyn, Oswald, and Offa, for instance, were great Princes, and ought not to be mingled with the common herd; but as it would be deviating from my plan to dwell any longer on this part of the history, and these specimens I have given will sufficiently shew the manners, dispositions, and contests of the Princes of that period, I shall proceed to the reign of Egbert, in whose person the regal state was united, and who reigned the first Monarch of England.

The Lords who were deputed by the West-Saxons to offer the crown to Egbert on the death of Brightric, found him in the court of Charlemagne: having perfected himself in the art of war under this great Commander, he was fired by the prospect of his victories, and thirsted for an opportunity of displaying his military talents. In this interval he had qualified himself with every art that was proper to adorn a throne, and probably had planned at that time the union of the heptarchy; he therefore readily accepted the crown that was offered him.

No sooner had he taken the reins of government into his hands, than he saw the superiority he had over the other Monarchs, and resolved to take advantage of it; but, like an able politician, he judged it necessary to act with the greatest precaution for fear of alarming the neighbouring Kings: to this end he spent several years in regulating the affairs of his own kingdom, and
in

in gaining the love and affection of his subjects. His first care was to teach his troops the discipline he had learned whilst in the service of Charlemagne; and his next, to convince them of its superiority over any other. Two proper objects to try their prowess offered themselves to his choice; the kingdom of Kent, or the territories still in possession of the Britons: to attack the former would probably have ruined his plan, as it was then governed by Kenulph, King of Mercia, a Prince of distinguished courage, and head of the heptarchy; he therefore prudently declined rousing so respectable an enemy, and determined to carry his arms against the Cornish Britons.

The first campaign he made served to convince his soldiers of the efficacy of the discipline he had introduced among them, the Britons being unable to resist their attacks, notwithstanding they made incredible efforts. The Welch intending to assist their brethren in Cornwall, Egbert made

this a pretence for invading their territories next year, when, in spite of the most vigorous opposition, he defeated them in several engagements, and at last wrested several provinces from them: but he was soon convinced of the impossibility of subduing them entirely; the Britons were a hardy and obstinate nation, inflexibly fond of liberty, and implacable against their conquerors. Their struggles to preserve their independency against Egbert were the struggles of men who knew the true value of liberty, and were determined to die free: even after he had laid their country waste by fire and sword, he was obliged to have recourse to threats to keep them in a temporary subjection; to which purpose he issued a proclamation which made it death for any Briton to pass Offa's dyke *.

The

* Offa, King of Mercia, having driven the Welch Britons back from his kingdom, on which they had made an unexpected invasion, threw up a rampart defended by a large ditch, which served as a barrier between Mercia and

The death of Kenulph, King of Mercia, happening at this juncture, Egbert was immediately raised to the head of the heptarchy, and from this time every thing conspired to favour his great designs. The heptarchy was now reduced to five kingdoms, those of Kent and Essex having been for some time absorbed in the others, and of these his own was the most considerable. In the other four, the race of their antient Kings being extinct, quarrels and dissensions arose among the Nobles, who all thought they had a right to aspire to the crown; therefore so far were they from regarding the public good, that they consulted only their own interest; and instead of attending to the transactions of their neighbouring Potentates, employed themselves in forming parties and cabals to support their ambitious pretensions.

and Wales: this intrenchment, called Clawdh-Offa or Offa's-dyke, was twenty-four miles in length, reaching from the mouth of the river Dee to the place where the Wye empties itself into the Severn.

Bernalph,

Bernulph, the succeeding King of Mercia, alone saw through Egbert's designs; he might not perhaps suspect the whole of his intentions, but he perceived that he was growing too powerful for the general interest: he could foresee that his own dominions by their situation were in danger, and on that account he took the opportunity of Egbert's absence to invade that part of the West-Saxon territories which bordered on Mercia: this invasion prevented Egbert from improving his conquests in Cornwall, and obliged him to march against the Mercians. The two armies met at Ellandunum, now Wilton near Salisbury, where a battle ensued, which was fought with great bravery on both sides, but at last terminated in favour of Egbert, who entirely destroyed the army of his enemy in its retreat, as they were at a distance from their own country. Egbert was not sorry that Bernulph had thus furnished him with a pretext for turning his arms against him, and for breaking the power of the Mercian kingdom, the greatest

obstacle to his designs : he accordingly without delay took post in such an advantageous situation, that it was impossible for Bernulph to frustrate them,

Whilst he attacked a part of Mercia which formerly belonged to the West-Saxons, he sent his Son Ethelwulph, attended by Wulfherd, an experienced General, to reduce the kingdom of Kent : Baldred, the King of that nation, who ought rather to be termed a Viceroy of the Mercians than a Sovereign, solicited the assistance of Bernulph, but in vain ; his late defeat rendered it impossible for him to bring an army into the field for the relief of his dependent, and Egbert was posted in such a manner, that if this had been practicable, he must have forced his way through his victorious troops ; consequently Bernulph was both unable and afraid to make the attempt : Baldred, however, notwithstanding his weakness, hazarded a battle, and being easily defeated was obliged to seek for shelter
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in Mercia, by which Egbert was rendered master of the whole country south of the Thames.

The East-Saxons, who were also held in subjection to the Mercians, dissatisfied with the behaviour of their oppressors, readily submitted to Egbert; and the East-Angles likewise, spirited up to revolt by his emissaries, sent Ambassadors to him offering their submission and desiring his protection. Bernulph, unable to oppose Egbert, but thinking himself strong enough to chastise the East-Angles for their defection, and to reduce them to their duty, drew off his forces towards their borders: he hastened his march that he might be able to attack them before their distance would allow them to receive any reinforcements from Egbert; but the Angles, without any assistance, defeated his army, and slew him in the engagement.

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The Mercians, unwilling to lose the kingdom of the East-Angles, first placed Lucidan on their throne; but he being soon slain or assassinated, they pitched upon Witglaph, a Lord of great merit, whose Son had married a Daughter of their late King Kenulph, to succeed him. Egbert fearing the election of this Nobleman, to whose valour he was no stranger, might give an unfavourable turn to his affairs, now pulled off the mask and openly declared in favour of the Angles. Hitherto he had only assisted them privately, at least he had not made himself a party in the war, though he had fomented it that they might weaken each other: but as soon as he found, from the great preparations of the Mercians, that there was a probability of their subduing the Angles, he thought it necessary to take other measures by publicly assisting them, and declaring war against the Mercians. Witglaph did all he could to withstand him; he frequently tried his fortune in skirmishes and unimportant conflicts, but without success;

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at last having lost a general battle, and finding his cause desperate, he fled to the abbey of Croyland, where he lay concealed three months.

In the mean time Egbert, pursuing his victory, made himself master of the kingdom of Mercia without any further opposition: he designed to have united it to his own dominions; but at length pitying the misfortunes of the exiled Monarch, he permitted him to leave his retirement, and through the mediation of Seward, Abbot of Croyland, restored him to his throne on condition of his paying an annual tribute. This condescension of Egbert had a happy effect on the minds of the Mercians, and reconciled them to the terms he imposed. The East-Angles were now convinced that they had been fighting his battles, not their own, and instead of recovering their liberty, were obliged to sit down contented with having only changed their master.

Northumberland

Northumberland was now the only kingdom which had not submitted to this enterprising Monarch, but, like those he had already subdued, was rent so much by intestine quarrels that it was unable to make any resistance : finding it therefore an easy prey, he marched to add it to his conquests. As soon as his army reached as far as Yorkshire, Andred, the Monarch of the Northumbrians, readily accepted the same terms as those he had granted the other nations, and was glad to become tributary to this irresistible Commander.

The several kingdoms of the Saxon heptarchy being thus either in Egbert's possession, or governed by Kings who were his vassals, in order to give a greater sanction to his authority, he summoned a general council of the Clergy and Laity at Winchester, where he was solemnly crowned King of Britain. An edict was issued for abolishing all distinctions among the Saxon kingdoms, and it was also commanded,
that

that the united heptarchy should be called from that time by the name of Engle-land. This name was not now first imposed on this island, but renewed; for a person of Egbert's ambition would, without doubt, have named his kingdom from his own subjects, rather than from a people he had conquered. The title of Englishmen was made use of to denominate the inhabitants in general, whether Saxons or Angles, some centuries before the reign of Egbert; and it is probable that the name of Britain was changed to England, as an old Historian positively asserts, a little after the founding of the seven kingdoms, by the unanimous consent of the seven Kings, either from Angles-land, the land of the Angles, or being contracted, from Hengist-land, the land of Hengist, the first Saxon Leader that made a settlement on it.

Egbert had now attained the summit of his wishes, was the most glorious King that had ever governed this island, and was uni-

versally respected by his subjects: but this sunshine was soon obscured by unexpected clouds, and his tranquillity interrupted by the descents of the Danes.

As this people so much disturbed the reign of the Monarch whose history I am more particularly to give my Readers, and make so interesting a part of it, some account of their extraction, manners, and customs appears necessary. Scandinavia, which contained those extensive tracts that lie to the north of Europe, is supposed to have been peopled not long after the flood by two nations, or rather by two branches of the same nation, the Goths and Swedes, who founded two large kingdoms in this part of the world: from these two nations, who were sometimes united, sometimes divided, sprang all those colonies which, after the decline of the Roman empire, over-ran the rest of Europe. In the reign of Erick, the sixth King of the Goths, his kingdom was

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become

become so populous, that the country was unable to maintain its inhabitants.

To remedy this inconvenience, which every day increased, he was compelled to send off part of his subjects to seek their fortunes in the neighbouring isles: these colonies in a length of time not only peopled the islands, but on the evacuation of it by the Suevi, Franks, and Saxons, who travelled to the South, as before observed, they took possession of Jutland on the continent, then known by the name of Cimbria Chersonesus. The people thus spread over the isles and the Chersonese continued for more than seven hundred years under the dominion of their antient Governors, till Humell, the sixteenth King of the Goths, formed them into an independent kingdom, and gave them his Son for their King, whose name being Dan, their country was from thenceforward called Danemark, now Denmark.

Norway

Norway also was peopled with Gothic colonies, and remained for many ages under the Kings of Gothland, nor was it till the eleventh century, and after many revolutions, that it became subject to a King of its own.

The Danes and Norwegians being thus separated from their ancestors the Goths and Swedes, they began to grow powerful, and the situation of their country affording great plenty of every thing necessary for building and equipping a fleet, they soon became masters of the sea : they now employed their naval force in plundering ships, and in ravaging the coasts of Europe ; the neighbouring powers, unable to make head against them, being obliged to submit to their depredations. France, England, and the Low Countries were more particularly exposed to their robberies, and for about one hundred and fifty years nothing was to be seen at sea but Danish pirates.

As mankind encrease exceedingly in cold climates, Denmark and Norway, like the country of their ancestors, became in time overstocked with inhabitants, and they were forced, in order to make room for the rest, to send off large colonies. Their natural inclination to the sea, and the opportunities it afforded them of committing piracies under pretence of looking out for habitations, made these emigrants abandon their country without reluctance. The great booty with which many of these adventurers returned, tempted the richest and most powerful of their countrymen to pursue the same methods: they entered into associations, and fitted out fleets purposely to ravage countries; they used to coast along the seashore, making descents on those places where they were likely to meet with the least resistance, and then returned home with what plunder they gained, which they distributed with great exactness. At length they were so accustomed to these profitable expeditions, that very large fleets put to sea,

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their Kings granting them premission, and when a considerable booty was in view, even commanding them in person.

These are the people which committed such horrid devastations, and kept the neighbouring maritime nations in constant alarm: they were called in France Normans, that is, men of the North; and in the tenth century they got such footing in the northern borders of that kingdom under Rollo, a famous Chieftain, that Charles the Simple, to free himself from further ravages, granted him that part of Neustria he was already in possession of, with the title of Duke of Normandy. In England they were generally stiled Pagans, till they were attended in their descents by some of the Danish Princes, when they were distinguished by the name of Danes.

The first time they were seen on this island, was in the reign of Brightric, King of Wessex, when they came rather to descry the

country than to plunder. They landed from three ships in the Isle of Portland, and their numbers appeared so inconsiderable, that the chief Magistrate of the town went out with a small force, intending to apprehend and commit them to prison. He soon perceived his mistake, but even then too late to correct it; for the Danes attacked him with so much fury that scarce a single man escaped: the fate of their countrymen soon roused the English, who poured on the enemy from all parts, and obliged them to retreat to their ships.

Six years after they made a descent on the coast of Northumberland, where they collected what booty they could; but being opposed by Offa, King of Mercia, they were driven back to their vessels, and had no sooner put to sea than they were overtaken by a tempest, in which most of them perished on the English shore. As they were divided into different bodies independent of each other, and had a large extent
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of coast to make their invasions on, it was impossible to guard against their attempts, or to enter into a treaty with them, so as to prevent their descents for the future: as soon as one body was departed with their booty another would succeed them, and the good fortune of having expelled one enemy was no security against another.

The only defence against their incursions was omitted by the Saxons, who had for many years neglected their marine, and turned their thoughts entirely to battles on land. For want of this precaution, soon after Egbert was settled on the throne of England, the Danes landed on the Isle of Sheepy unopposed, and having plundered the adjacent country, retired before it was possible to attack them. This success encouraged them to make a descent the following year on the western coast; they cruized along the channel with thirty-five sail of ships, and landed a body of fifteen thousand men at Charmouth in Dorsetshire.

Egbert, on the first news of their landing, marched against them with what troops he could then draw together, not doubting but they would hastily repair to their ships at his approach ; but finding, contrary to his expectation, that they firmly stood their ground, he determined to attack them ; he did so, and soon experienced that he had to deal with a much more formidable enemy than he imagined : after a long and bloody battle, he had the vexation to behold them victorious, and his own army entirely routed. With great reluctance he left the field ; but they pressed so hard upon him, that he was at length obliged to follow his flying troops, and was indebted to the darkness of the night for the preservation of his life. How great this mortification to a Prince who till then had always been victorious ! Though the Danes remained masters of the field, yet they had met with so rough a reception, that they gave up all thoughts of plunder, and betook themselves quietly to their ships.

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It happened unfortunately that the Britons retained so inveterate an hatred against the Saxons, that though it was their mutual interest to assist in repelling these piratical invaders, they on the contrary joined the Danes, and aided them in their attempts. Being informed of this disposition of the Britons, about two years after, another corps of Danes landed in Cornwall, where they were received with joy, and after they had been reinforced by some of the natives, began their march to meet and give the English Monarch battle. They were in hopes of coming upon him before he was prepared, but were surprized to find him marching towards them with all expedition : having learned experience from his late defeat, he had held his army in readiness to march against them on the first alarm, determined to retrieve the honour he had lost at Charmouth ; nor was he disappointed in his expectations : such was his alacrity, that he met them before they could get out of the county of Cornwall, and attacking them
with

with great fury at Hengist-Dun, now Hengstone-Hill, obtained a complete victory ; thus totally eradicating the disgrace of his former defeat. The Britons were forced to fly to their inaccessible mountains, whilst the Danes retired hastily to their ships ; and this fortunate blow delivered England for some short time from any further invasions.

In the year following the English were robbed by Death of this great Prince, after he had reigned thirty-seven years ; twenty as King of Wessex only, seven with the dignity of Sovereign of the heptarchy, and ten years as Monarch of all England : he left behind him the character of an accomplished Commander, a consummate Politician, and a humane Sovereign. Egbert was succeeded in the year 838 by his Son Ethelwulph, who, during the life of an elder Brother, had been educated in the monastery at Winchester, and had professed himself a Monk. Pope Leo, on the death of his Brother, granted him a dispensation to
quit

quit the Monkish habit, at the request of Egbert, who had now no other Son to succeed him in his kingdom: after his being secularized, he had assisted his Father in his expeditions against the Danes, and had given signal marks of intrepidity; but he had contracted such an habitual propensity to indolence and inactivity during his confinement in the cloister, as gave his Father great uneasiness: even on his death-bed the King could not help telling him, that he might be happy on the throne he was about to quit to him, if he did not, by his indolence, suffer the kingdoms which he had united and consolidated with so much pains, to dissolve away.

The very first year after Ethelwulph's accession the Danes appeared off Southampton with a fleet of thirty-three sail, and having landed their men, roved up and down the country, laying it waste in a terrible manner. The new King, who was too inactive to command his army in person, detached

detached a considerable body of troops under Wulfherd, an able and experienced Officer, to chastise them for their insolence. The English General engaged the Danes, and after an obstinate engagement drove them back to their ships with great loss. This victory however afforded but a transient gleam of satisfaction to the King, as it was soon followed by the death of this valuable Commander, with the news that a fresh body of Danes had made a descent at Portland, and were pillaging the country: Ethelhelm, another of his Commanders, was ordered to oppose them at the head of the Dorsetshire forces; with these he charged them so furiously that he put them into disorder; but receiving fresh supplies from their ships, the Danes returned to the charge with such bravery, that the English were obliged to yield in their turn, and had their General slain in the field.

The variety of descents the Danes had made in the different parts of the island, discovered

covered to them its fertility, and made them desirous of procuring a settlement on it : with this view they arrived with thirty-five large ships at Charmouth, where King Egbert had formerly been defeated. The landing of such a numerous body, and the measures they took to secure a permanent establishment, roused the indolent Ethelwulph from his lethargy : assembling his forces without delay, he marched himself at their head and gave them battle ; but, as if that spot was destined to be fatal to his family, he was forced to leave them masters of the field. The Danes, however, weakened too much by the loss they had sustained in the engagement, to maintain their ground as they had proposed, once more evacuated the island.

The year in which this happened was rendered remarkable by the total destruction of the Picts : after a long war with the Scots, their neighbours, they lost two battles successively, which disabled them from
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making any further resistance ; when Kenneth the Second, King of Scotland, exasperated against them for having slain his Father, and inhumanly mangled his corpse, persuaded his subjects that they ought not to let slip so favourable an opportunity of rooting out a nation which had been perpetually their enemies. His advice was approved of, and put in execution with such a barbarous fury, that from thence forward nothing remained but the bare name of that miserable nation, after it had flourished so long in the northern parts of this island.

The Danes continuing their incursions without any respite, Ethelwulph thought himself unable to govern alone all his dominions, exposed as they were to these perpetual insults ; he therefore resolved to deliver up Kent, Essex, and Suffex, with the title of King of Kent, to Athelstan, his natural Son, whom he tenderly loved, reserving to himself the sovereignty of all England, and the kingdom of Wessex. Though this prudent

dent expedient contributed to the security of the southern coast, yet it did not free it entirely from invasions ; the Danes frequently landed in other parts with various success, nor could a defeat prevent their speedy return : their fleets and armies continually grew more numerous, till they sailed up the river Thames on board of three hundred and fifty vessels ; with this formidable force they took the cities of Canterbury and London, and routed Bertulph, King of Mercia, who marched to oppose them ; but penetrating into Surry, they were met by Ethelwulph and his son Athelstan, at Okeley, where a bloody battle ensued, in which the Danes were vanquished with so dreadful a slaughter, that very few escaped. After the battle of Okeley, as we hear no more of Athelstan, it is to be presumed that he was either slain in the field, or did not long survive that great victory, to which his valour had not a little contributed.

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Although Ethelwulph had several legitimate Sons that were old enough to assist him in the administration of public affairs, yet he did not think it prudent to place his eldest Son, Ethelbald, on the throne of Athelstan; besides that he had no great affection for him, he dreaded his restless and turbulent spirit, which he could not controul, as the young Prince had thought himself no less deserving of a crown than Athelstan, and was much disgusted at this seeming piece of injustice; Ethelwulph therefore took the government of the whole kingdom into his own hands.

The victory at Okeley over the Danes having procured him some respite from these formidable enemies, he was at liberty to follow the natural bent of his mind, and indulge himself in the conversation of Monks, or the exercises of superstition. He had two favourites who had an equal share in his affection and confidence; the one was Swithin, Bishop of Winchester, the other Alstan,

Alstan, Bishop of Sherborne: but though both were Prelates, their characters and views were widely different; the former an artful Bigot, humouring his Master's favourite propensity, continually preached to him the vanity of earthly pomp, recalled to his remembrance the tranquil pleasures of a religious life, and endeavoured to detach him entirely from all worldly cares: whilst the latter, who was a greater Politician than his associate, a sincerer friend to his Sovereign, and a more real lover of his country, strove to rouse him from the lethargy into which the discourses of the other had thrown him; to this purpose he never ceased from animating his courage and ambition, by bringing to his remembrance the glorious deeds of his Ancestors, particularly of his Father Egbert; at the same time exhorting him to support the honour of his family: nor was the patriotic zeal of this disinterested Monitor confined to exhortations alone; he not only persuaded the King to employ his time in making preparations for the re-

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turn of the Danes, which he foresaw, notwithstanding their late repulse, would certainly happen, but he furnished him with money to hasten these preparations.

By turns their influence prevailed, and the easy King yielded himself up alternately to their sway. When the inroads of the Danes alarmed the country, Ethelwulph listened to the counsels of Alstan; but when he found there was a probability of his enjoying some quiet, he became a dupe to the suggestions of Swiðin: as the former had the inclinations of the King to combat with he daily lost ground, whilst the latter, by soothing them, found his power every day increase.

Ethelwulph being now entirely guided by the Bishop of Winchester, he strove to convince him of his attention to his precepts, by his munificence to the church and the clergy, which at length degenerated into extravagance and the most lavish profusion.

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In order to convince the Pope of the sincerity of his devotion, he sent his son Alfred, then about five years old, with a numerous retinue to Rome, where he received confirmation from his Holiness at that early age, as some return for his Father's zeal and liberality. As this ceremony was then performed by unction, after Alfred's accession to the throne it gave occasion to several Writers to compliment the Pope on his prophetic talents ; but if the young Prince was then anointed a King, why were his Brothers allowed to reign before him, as this divination of his Holiness might be supposed to confer a prior claim to the English throne ? or why was a second unction thought necessary at his coronation ?

This mark of Ethelwulph's piety and devotion to the court of Rome was not sufficient to satisfy one of his bigotry ; the year after his Son's journey to Rome, he resolved to go thither himself, that he might receive the Pope's benediction ; nor could

the dangerous situation of his kingdom, threatened hourly with fresh invasions from the Danes; divert him from this intention. his enthusiasm effaced every humane impression from his mind; the danger his subjects would be exposed to in his absence was to him but a secondary consideration; he was resolved to go, and he set out without even nominating a regency to act in his absence.

At his arrival Pope Leo, the fourth of that name, gave him an honourable reception, and received in return all the respect and submission that could be expected from so devout a Prince. During his stay at Rome he visited every shrine, and paid his devotions to every relick, omitting no religious ceremony that could feed his superstition. The English college, founded by Ina and enlarged by Offa, having been lately burnt down, he caused it to be rebuilt in a more magnificent manner than before; and desirous to endow it with
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greater revenues than his Predecessors had done, he extended the tax of Peter's pence throughout his dominions, which hitherto had been levied only in the kingdoms of Mercia and Wesssex ; he also, as a stronger proof of his liberality and weakness, entered into an obligation to send over to Rome a yearly tribute of three hundred marks, two-thirds of which were appropriated to defray the expence of tapers in the churches dedicated to St. Peter and St. Paul, and the remaining hundred to the Pope's private use.

Ethelwulph having satisfied his devotion and curiosity by a twelvemonth's stay in Rome, returned home through France ; where being captivated with Judith, Daughter of Charles the Bald, a young Princess not above twelve years old, he married her : this unseasonable match added another pretence to a conspiracy that was forming against him, and gave rise to such troubles as had nearly cost him his crown.

Whilst Ethelwulph gratified the impulses of his bigotry and passion abroad, Alstan, Bishop of Sherbourne, his late favourite, fearing that the nation would fall a sacrifice to the King's indolence, and piqued at the ascendancy which Swithin had gained over his Master's affections, engaged his son Ethelbald, and Eanwulph Earl of Somerset, in a conspiracy against him. The young Prince easily entered into his measures, being, as before observed, disgusted at his Father for not investing him with the kingdom of Kent after Athelstan's death. This disgust Alstan took care to aggravate, by representing to him that Ethelwulph lived more like a Monk than a King, and from his negligence exposed his kingdom to danger and ruin ; that since he had delighted so much in conversing with Monks, it was proper that he should pass the remainder of his days in a monastery, and leave his kingdom to his Son, who knew better how to govern it.

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The news of the old King's nuptials added weight to the Prelate's arguments, and determined Ethelbald to seize on the crown, as he had now reason to fear, that if there should be any children by this second marriage, they would dispute with him, by the assistance of the King of France, the succession to it : these suggestions not only convinced the Prince of the expediency of opposing his Father's return, but likewise brought over a great part of the Nobility to espouse his measures. As Ethelwulph had dignified his new Wife with the title of Queen, contrary to the express terms of the law made on account of Bright-ric's murder, by which the West-Saxons were absolved from their oath of allegiance on a breach of it, they laid hold of this pretence to colour their revolt.

The King, informed of these proceedings, immediately left France, and arrived in England with his new Queen before his opponents could take the necessary measures

to hinder his landing: all things now tended to bring on a civil war, which could not but prove fatal to the kingdom, since, besides other mischiefs, it must unavoidably tempt the Danes to repeat their ravages: but the principal Noblemen and Prelates, foreseeing the calamities that would ensue, interposed and endeavoured to bring the contending parties to an accommodation. The King being old and of an easy nature, and finding his Son at the head of a formidable opposition, he thought it prudent to pursue peaceable measures; to this purpose, he consented to give up to his Son his antient kingdom of Wessex, reserving to himself only the kingdom of Kent. By this means peace was re-established in the island, and though some of his Courtiers advised the King not to sign so partial and unequal a treaty, yet they could not prevail on him to put a stop to the accommodation. Amidst the flame of superstition and bigotry, some sparks of genuine and unadulterated Christianity would now and then break out: he
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told them he did not set so high a value upon the dominions allotted to his Son, as to purchase them at the price of a civil war, especially as he foresaw that, although it might be in his power to recover them, yet his death would soon put Ethelbald in possession of them again.

This part of his declaration proved to be prophetic; for he outlived this partition but two years, which he spent in a manner becoming so religious a Prince, in works of charity and devotion; and when he found his end approaching, concluded his life with an act of prudence. To prevent disputes among his children, he settled the succession by will: the territories over which he ruled himself, he bequeathed to his second son, Ethelbert, in case of whose death they were to descend to Ethelred, and for want of male issue were entailed on Alfred the youngest, the kingdom of Wessex to be added to them on the death of Ethelbald. His personal estate he gave to charitable uses, directing his Successors to maintain one poor person for every tithing
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on his hereditary lands. Having made these dispositions, which were confirmed by the West-Saxon Nobility, he expired in the year 857, after a reign of twenty years, and was succeeded in Wessex by his son Ethelbald, and by Ethelbert in Kent.

Ethelbald's reign was not characterized by any event of moment, or any action of his own worth recording: he governed for some time in an arbitrary manner, indulged himself in every vice, and acquired by his indolence and perfidy the hatred of his people. He made no scruple of incestuously marrying Judith, his Father's Widow *, whose tender years indeed rendered her a

* This circumstance is omitted by the French Historians, who say, that her marriage with Ethelwulph not being consummated, by reason of her youth, she returned to France, from whence she was carried off by Baldwyn, surnamed Ironhand, Earl of Flanders. Perhaps they knew nothing of her second marriage, or did not think proper to mention it, as reflecting on the family of Charles the Great: there however seems no doubt of its having taken place, as all the English Writers speak of it as a certain matter of fact.

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more proper match for him than for the late King, but which drew on him the severest remonstrances of Swithin, Bishop of Winchester. By these however he was at length reclaimed, and having divorced his Wife, and undergone a severe penance, he made some atonement for his former crimes, by a strict observance of the Bishop's admonitions. On his death, which happened in the year 860, his crown devolved, agreeable to the will of the old King, to Ethelbert his Brother, a Prince as remarkable for his virtues as Ethelbald had been for his vices; and the possessions which Egbert had left unbroken to Ethelwulph became again united.

The administration of Ethelbert was conducted with so much moderation, that no civil commotion disturbed the national tranquillity during his reign. The Danes having for some time intermitted their piracies, they were almost forgotten, and no preparations had been made to repel their attacks: however,

however, soon after Ethelbert's coronation they renewed their invasions, and finding no opposition made to their landing, penetrated as far as Winchester, the capital of Wessex, which they plundered and reduced to ashes. It was not till they were returning to their ships, loaden with booty, that a sufficient body of troops could be raised to revenge this insult, when Osric and Ethelwulph, two West-Saxon Earls, pursued them, and having put them to flight with great slaughter, recovered the plunder they had taken.

Not long after another body landed in the Isle of Thanet, where they wintered, that they might be in readiness to begin their incursions in the spring; but Ethelbert, uneasy at their being fixed in his dominions, as he was unable to dislodge them, offered them a considerable sum to retire without committing any depredations. The perfidious Danes accepted the offer, and taking advantage of the truce which had
been

been concluded on the payment of the money, attacked the English unprepared, and wasted all the eastern part of the kingdom of Kent. Ethelbert was not in a situation to take revenge for this treachery; however, having learned by it that nothing but force would rid him of so faithless an enemy, he set about levying an army sufficient to intercept them in their retreat, and prevent them from carrying off their booty: the dread of these preparations made them embark with their plunder so hastily, that his intentions were frustrated, and they got away unmolested.

The year following Ethelbert died, universally lamented by his subjects, whose affections he had acquired by the prudence and justice of his government: though he left two Sons they did not succeed him, his younger brother, Ethelred, ascending the throne by virtue of Ethelwulph's will.

The reign of Ethelred was short and troublesome; from the day of his coronation to that of his death he had one continued conflict with the Danes: they began with attacking Northumberland, of which they made themselves masters; they proceeded next to East-Anglia, which they also subdued; and having obliged the Mercians to purchase their ransom with a large sum of money, they entered Wesssex. Notwithstanding the valour of Ethelred, and the noble stand he made against them, he had the vexation, at his death, to leave them in the heart of his kingdom, and in a condition to complete the conquest of the whole. These are the principal events of this Prince's reign; but as they more particularly affect the Hero of my work than any of the transactions of the preceding Monarchs, and tend to elucidate the state of the kingdom, when Alfred succeeded to the throne of his Brother, I shall relate, with precision, the most remarkable circumstances of it.

Some

Some Historians have asserted, that a disagreement early took place between Ethelred and his brother Alfred, as the former, on his accession, laid claim not only to the hereditary dominions of the West-Saxon Kings, but likewise to some conquered provinces, in direct violation of a covenant made with Alfred some time before, and attested by the English Nobility; to which they add, that Alfred, being at this time seventeen years old, demanded the performance of this contract in presence of the same Nobles, when Ethelred refusing to make good the terms of his former agreements, a new one was drawn up, wherein it was stipulated that Alfred, on giving up his present claims, should succeed to the whole kingdom at Ethelred's decease, and in the mean time be allowed certain lands for his subsistence; on which the Brothers united in perfect harmony, and acted in concert against the Danes. This account of a dissension between the two Brothers appears improbable, and as it is omitted by several Writers,

Writers, whose care or veracity is not to be doubted, I shall only thus slightly mention it. Alfred being nearly arrived at man's estate on Ethelred's accession, might then apply to him for some regular allowance to enable him to support the dignity of his birth, and, at the same time, his right to the crown, agreeable to the will of their Father, might be acknowledged and confirmed; but that a quarrel should arise concerning Alfred's claim to some conquered provinces, of which there appear no traces, Ethelwulph and his Sons having too much employ from the Danes to extend their dominions, is greatly to be doubted, as well as Alfred's succession to the throne, by virtue of this agreement with Ethelred, rather than by his Father's will.

Till this time Alfred had been educated according to the custom of the Saxon Nobility, in hunting and the other pleasures of the field, by which he was rendered hardy, exercised in patience, and inured to labour, watching,

watching, and hunger ; but being now eighteen years of age, he was called by his Brother to partake with him in hardier encounters and more important contests.

The authority King Egbert had reserved to himself over the kingdoms of Mercia, East-Anglia, and Northumberland, and left to his son Ethelwulph, had been gradually weakened by the descents of the Danes, and that attention the Kings of Wesssex were consequently obliged to bestow on the defence of their hereditary dominions.

The Northumbrians being the most remote, on observing this relaxation, had laid aside their internal animosities, and unanimously seated Osbert on the throne : this union bid fair to raise that kingdom to its former splendour, had not an unforeseen accident revived their dissensions, and plunged them again into new troubles.

G

Osbert,

Osbert, who kept his court at York, returning one day from the chace, called at the house of Bruern Bocard, one of his chief Noblemen, for some refreshment : the Earl happening to be from home, his Lady entertained the King with much respect and hospitality ; but being a person of great beauty, and of the most engaging behaviour, she excited unwarrantable desires in the breast of the Northumbrian Monarch. Osbert, unable to controul his passion, led her insensibly into a private room, under pretence of having some business of importance to communicate to her in the absence of the Earl, where, after several attempts to gain her compliance by intreaties, he made use of force, and triumphed over her. The Earl, on his return, found his Wife bathed in tears, and being informed of the violence committed against his honour, repaired immediately, with a body of his friends and relations, to court, where he surrendered his lands to the King, and boldly renounced his allegiance.

From

From this moment he devoted his whole attention to the study of revenge, and having great interest among the Northumbrians, who were in general disgusted at this base action of their King, he found means to alienate the minds of many of his subjects. The Bernicians, who constituted a part of them, looking on Osbert as unworthy to govern, revolted, and, electing another King named Ella, placed him on the throne, with a resolution to support him on it. Thus was that kingdom once more involved in all the horrors of a civil war, and as the contending parties were so equally matched that neither of them dared to hazard a battle, these calamities continued the longer.

The offended Earl, thinking his vengeance still incomplete, resolved to call in the aid of a foreign power to accomplish it: to this purpose he took a voyage to Denmark, where he soon persuaded Hinguar,

the reigning Monarch *, to espouse his cause, by representing to him the distracted state of Northumberland, and the probability of succeeding in an attempt to gain possession of it.

Revenge as well as ambition urged Hinguar on; for Regnerus, his Father, having been taken prisoner in one of their former expeditions to England, was, by command of Ella, thrown into a ditch of serpents, where he miserably perished. The circumstances which are said to have contributed to bring on this invasion of the Danish Kings, are given by some Authors in a different manner, but as they contradict those recited in the last paragraph, I shall leave the credibility of each to the judgment of my Readers.

* It does not appear that Hinguar and Hubba were Kings of the Danes, but rather great Chieftains. Pontanus, in his history of Denmark, makes no mention of any Kings of that name; and Ingulphus particularly says, That Godrum and Basseg were the Kings, Hinguar and Hubba being only Earls or Leaders.

The

The story says, that Lodebroch, King of Denmark, going a hawking among some small islands in a little boat, accompanied only by a dog, was driven out to sea by a storm, and cast upon the English coast near Yarmouth: he was immediately seized and brought to the court of Edmund, then King of East-Anglia, who, finding him a dexterous sportsman, was pleased with his company. The envy of Bern, the King's falconer, being excited by this preference given to a stranger, he drew him into a wood under pretence of shewing him game, and there barbarously murdered him. In a few days Lodebroch's dog came to the palace half famished, and being fed, hastened away again: this visit of the dog being frequently repeated, the King ordered him to be watched, when the dead body of his master was discovered. The circumstances being examined into, Bern was judged guilty of the murder; he was therefore condemned to be put into the same boat wherein Lodebroch arrived, and without food or

tackle to be committed to the mercy of the sea. Fortune reiterated the accident, and as safely conveyed Bern to the opposite shore, as it had brought the Danish Prince hither. The boat being known on its arrival, Bern was apprehended, and pressed to declare what had happened to Lodebroch; he told them, that being cast on the coast of East-Anglia, he was put to death by King Edmund's order: upon which Hinguar and Hubba, the Sons of Lodebroch, sailed for East-Anglia with a numerous army, but were driven by bad weather on a part of the kingdom of Northumberland.

Whatever was his inducement, Hinguar having equipped a powerful fleet, set sail for England in the spring, accompanied by his brother Hubba, and landed on the northern shore of the Humber without opposition; from thence he marched directly to York, where Osbert was drawing all his forces together to stop his progress. In this extremity Osbert applied to Ella, though his
professed

professed enemy, for assistance; which, terrified at the approach of so formidable a foe, he readily granted him, and the two Kings, prudently suspending their animosity, agreed to join their forces together to oppose the common enemy.

Had Osbert maintained his post in the capital of York, the Danes would probably have been obliged to divide their forces, and consequently may have been overpowered; but that Prince, giving way to his impetuosity, issued out to meet them, before Ella, who was on his march, could join him: he charged the Danes with so much fury, that it was with the utmost difficulty they were able to sustain the shock; but the ardour of the English being at length abated, the Danes in their turn pressed upon them, and compelled them to retire with precipitation into the town. Osbert, vexed to see the victory thus snatched from him after he had thought himself secure of it, used every endeavour to rally his men, and

lead them again to the charge ; but, finding his efforts ineffectual, he threw himself into the midst of his enemies and perished.

This success having opened the gates of York to the Danes, they entered the town in order to refresh themselves, whilst Ella was advancing, in hopes of repairing the loss the nation had sustained by Osbert's precipitancy : but his attempts were also ineffectual ; for Hinguar having just triumphed over one of the Kings, was encouraged to advance to meet the other, and, in a battle no less bloody than the first, entirely vanquished him. Ella lost his life, with great numbers of his troops, and to this day the field adjoining to York, where his defeat happened, is called Ellefcroft.

After these two signal victories, the Danish General took possession of the whole kingdom of Northumberland without any further opposition. The following spring he marched against the Mercians, and advanced

vanced as far as Nottingham, in hopes of finding their King unprepared ; but Burthred expecting an invasion, had applied to Ethelred and Alfred, who were now arrived with an army of West-Saxons to his assistance. Hinguar, hearing of this reinforcement, intrenched himself so strongly, that the English Princes, when they approached, found it impracticable to attack him. Whilst both armies lay in this situation, a treaty was set on foot between them, and the Danes agreed, on receiving a certain sum, to retire into Northumberland. Burthred, to preserve his kingdom from the ravages of so destroying a foe, which even a victory would not have entirely prevented, accepted of these conditions ; when Hinguar retreated northward, and the West-Saxon Princes marched back to Wessex.

Though the Danes had thus spared the kingdom of Mercia, yet, accustomed to rapine, they could not remain inactive ; they marched into Lincolnshire, where they
committed

committed the most savage depredations, burning towns and cities, after plundering them of every thing valuable, ravishing and murdering women without the least remorse, no age or quality being secure from the wantonness of their barbarity.

The animated behaviour of the Abbess of Coldingham and her Nuns, as described by Mathew Westminster, was worthy of persons who had devoted themselves to a life of chastity and religious retirement, and entitles them to an honourable mention. In order to prevent both herself and those under her charge from exciting the lust of the Danes by their personal charms, calling them together into the chapter-house, she represented in a pathetic speech the brutal inclinations of the Danes, and persuaded them to disfigure their faces by cutting off their noses and upper lips with a razor, as the only means of preserving their vows inviolable: she then heroically set them an example, which they all immediately followed.

lowed. This expedient had its desired effect in preserving their honour, but it cost their lives; for the Danes, disgusted at the sight, and exasperated at their disappointment, set the monastery on fire, and consumed the Abbess, together with her Nuns, in the flames.

Being Infidels, they not only plundered all the monastries and religious houses in that country, but took a pleasure in killing the Monks, and totally destroying their habitations: the following account of the destruction of the rich abbeys of Bardney, Croyland, and Peterborough, is taken from Ingulphus,

The winter being ended, the Danes took shipping and landed at Humberstan in Lincolnshire, spoiled all that country, at the same time they destroyed the famous and antient monastery of Bardney, the Monks of all others being massacred in the church without mercy. When they had staid
 2 there

there all that summer, waſting the country, they at laſt came to Keſteven in the ſame province, where they committed the like murders and deſolations: upon which Count Algar drew together all the youth of Holland, with two Knights his Senefchals, named Wibert and Leofric, who marched at the head of them: he collected alſo a brave body of two hundred men belonging to Croyland abbey, who, being all ſtout luſty fellows, were led by one Foly, then a Monk, but formerly a famous foldier among the Mercians. Theſe taking with them about three hundred warlike men from Deeping and Boſton, to whom alſo joined Morchar Lord of Brune, with his ſtrong and numerous family, and being met by the Sheriff of Lincoln, a valiant and antient ſoldier, with the Lincolnſhire forces, they muſtered together in Keſteven, on St. Maurice's day, gave the Pagans battle, vanquiſhed them with the ſlaughter of three of their Kings, and a great number of common ſoldiers; they afterwards purſued them
to

to their very camp, where, finding a stout resistance, night at last parted them, and the Earl drew back his army. But it seems the same night there returned to the Danish camp all the rest of the Princes of that nation, who, dividing the county among them, had marched out to plunder. Their names are barbarous and too many to be all particularly mentioned, but their chief Kings were Godrum and Basseg, and their Earls or Leaders, Hinguar and Hubba, with others, who then came very seasonably with great forces, a multitude of captives, and a great deal of spoil. Their return being known, the greatest part of the Christians, struck with terror, fled away, whilst those that were left early in the morning, after hearing divine service and receiving the sacrament, being resolved to die for Christ, and in defence of their country, marched into the field against their enemies; but the Earl, perceiving his forces to be too much weakened, appointed Friar Foly, with his five hundred men, to fight in the right wing,

wing, because they were the strongest; and Earl Morchar, with those that followed him, as also the Sheriff of Lincoln, making other five hundred men, in the left wing; resolving himself, with his Seneschals, to keep the main body, as being most convenient for assisting either wing if there were occasion. The Danes being now exasperated at the slaughter of their men (having buried their three Kings at a place then called Laundon, but afterwards, from this burial, Trekyngham) two of their Kings and eight Counts marched out, whilst the rest guarded the camp and captives: but the Christians, because of the smallness of their number, drawing themselves up in one body, made with their shields a strong testudo against the force of their enemies arrows, and kept off the horse with their pikes; and thus, being well ordered by their Commanders, they kept their ground all day, but night coming on, notwithstanding till then they had remained unbroken, and had withstood the force of their enemies

arrows,

arrows, whose horses being tired began to flag, yet they very imprudently left an entire victory to the Pagans: for they feigning a flight on purpose, seemed to quit the field, which the Christians had no sooner perceived, however their Commanders forbid and opposed it, than they broke their ranks, and were all dispersed through the plain without any order or command: so that the Pagans, returning like lions upon a flock of sheep, made a most prodigious slaughter among them; whilst the stout Count Algar and Friar Foly, with some soldiers, getting upon a rising ground, and being drawn up in a round body, did for a long time endure their insults, till at last the said Earl and other Captains, seeing the stoutest men of their small army slain, got upon the thickest heaps of the Christians dead bodies, and, being resolved to sell their lives as dear as they could, after having received many wounds, died honourably in the field. There only now remained a few young men of Sutton and Gedeney,
but

but these flinging away their arms, fled into a neighbouring wood, and by that means escaping, came the night following to the Abbey of Croyland, where they related the slaughter of the Christians, and the loss of their whole company; which when they had told at the church door with great lamentations, the Abbot and Monks, being extremely confounded at this ill news, resolved to keep with them only the elder Monks, with some few small children, to provoke compassion, and so sent away all the younger men, together with the relicks, jewels, and charters of their monastery, by boat to the wood of Ancaryg, adjoining to their island, where they staid with one Toret an anchorite four days, being thirty in number. But the Abbot, with the rest of his brethren (after they had hid the rest of the plate with the rich table of the altar) expecting nothing less than to be made a sacrifice to the fury of the enemy, put on their sacred vestments, said mass, and communicated; which they had scarce finished,

when

when the Pagans, breaking into the church, slew Abbot Theodore at the altar, who perished by the hands of their King Asketule: after which they proceeded to dispatch the rest, which they did in so butcherly a manner, that there was not of old or young any that escaped; except one handsome boy of about ten years old, who was saved by Count Sidroc the younger, who stripped him of his habit, put him on a Danish coat, and ordered him to follow him wherever he went. When they had made an end of the slaughter, they broke open the tomb of St. Guthlac, and the Princes there buried; but finding a far more inconsiderable plunder than they expected, they set the church on fire, and burnt the dead bodies that were in it together. Four days after the destruction of Croyland, the Danes marched towards the monastery of Meldeſhampstead, now called Peterborough, where finding the gates locked, they began to make an assault upon it; but receiving a repulse, at the second assault Tuba, the

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Brother

Brother of Count Hubba, was knocked down with a stone and carried off for dead, whereat Hubba was so enraged, that breaking into the monastery, he slew all the Monks that came in his way, whilst the rest of them destroyed the others, till at last all perished; so that in short the monastery and the church, with the charters belonging to them, were wholly destroyed, together with a noble library of books, which was reduced to ashes. When they had continued here for the space of four days, they got together all the spoil they could, and marched towards Huntington; but in their way thither, as the two Count Sidrocs brought up the rear of their army, which had now passed the river Nene, two waggon loads of rich moveables happened to be sunk in the ford, as also the beasts that drew them; in getting out of which, whilst the young Sidroc and his men were busied, the boy which they had taken from Croyland slipped away into the wood, and, walking all night, about break of day he got to Croyland,

land, where he found the Monks returned again, and very active in quenching the fire as well as they could, to whom he related all that had happened, and, discovering where the body of the Abbot and most of the Monks lay, they removed the rubbish and buried them. This done, they first chose Godric, one of the Monks that escaped, for Abbot, and then resolved to go and do the like pious office for the late Prior and Monks of Mendeshampstead; where arriving, they buried the bodies of above fourscore Monks in one grave in the churchyard, placing over them a pyramidal stone of about a yard high, whereon were carved the images of the Abbot and Monks about him, which was to be seen in the time of Ingulphus. I have given a longer transcript of this account than of many others equally interesting, because it appears to be very descriptive of the manners of the age, and of the mode in which they then carried on their wars; at the same time, that it gives us a more exact idea of the horrid depredations

tions committed by the Danes, than some more modern relations. I have preserved the antique style in which the original translation is written, as it is expressive, and will not admit of any alteration without injuring the narrative.

Hinguar, not having met with the success he hoped for in his expedition against Mercia, turned his arms another way, where there appeared a probability of finding less opposition: leaving his brother Hubba in Northumberland, he embarked with the best of his troops, and made a descent on East-Anglia *, of which province Edmund (as mentioned before) was King. This

* From Hinguar's not attacking sooner the dominions of the King who was supposed to be the murderer of his Father, and for which, according to the story of Lodebroch before given, he is said to have purposely undertaken the expedition, we may naturally conclude that account to be apocryphal; or at least, that the Danish General's inducement for the voyage was, exclusive of avaritious views in common with his countrymen, to revenge the cause of Earl Bruen, who was of Danish extraction.

young

young Prince had been crowned King of East-Anglia at the age of fifteen, during the joint reign of Ethelwulph and Ethelbald. The inhabitants of that kingdom, taking advantage of the dissensions which then subsisted between the Father and Son, resolved to have a King of their own: he was the Son of Alcmund, a Prince of the royal blood, who fled into Germany when Offa seized on those territories; and being guided in his youth by the advice of Humbert, a learned and pious Prelate, who took care early to instil into his mind sentiments of justice and equity, his subjects were happy under his government: but more used to acts of devotion than to the exercise of arms, having given the Danes battle near Thetford, he was with ease overthrown, and compelled to save himself by flight. He attempted to conceal himself in a church, but being discovered, was brought before the Danish General at Hegelsdon, now Hoxton, in Suffolk, when his conqueror offered to leave him in possession of his kingdom,

provided he would acknowledge him for his Sovereign, and pay him tribute. Edmund nobly refusing to submit to these degrading conditions, Hinguar commanded that he should be tied to a tree, where, after suffering a thousand indignities, he was transfixed with arrows, and then beheaded. The extraordinary piety and devotion of this young King, accompanied by such a death, caused him to be canonized for a saint and a martyr; and his head being found some time after, he was buried at a place since denominated, from that circumstance, St. Edmund's Bury.

The great success which had attended the Danish arms since their arrival in England, encouraged Hinguar to extend his views, and to hope for a total conquest of it; and, having now got perfect intelligence of the state of the island, he found he must begin with the kingdom of Wessex, before he could complete his designs: in consequence of this plan, he collected all his forces, and
marched

marched towards the southern parts of the island; he penetrated with surprizing rapidity as far as Reading in Berkshire, which town, from its situation between the Thames and the Kennet, appearing a proper place to establish their head quarters, they strongly fortified it by trenches and ramparts: as soon as they had finished their intrenchments, Hinguar detached a large body of troops to forage, which being met by Ethelwulph, Earl of Berkshire, they were obliged to retire to their fortress, after an obstinate resistance, with the loss of one of their Commanders.

By this time the West-Saxon forces, under King Ethelred and his brother Alfred, arrived, and having cut off all the advanced parties, invested Reading. The Danes, collecting their forces, made a vigorous sally, in which they were so fortunate as to kill Ethelwulph the English General who had lately repulsed them, and to remain masters of the field. The English, incensed at the

loss of a Nobleman whom they greatly loved, and glowing with vexation at the stain they had received from this defeat, advanced four days after towards Ashdown, where they found the Danes, flushed with their late victory, drawn up in two bodies ready to receive them ; one of which was commanded by Hinguar and Hubba, the other by their principal Leaders. Ethelred, observing the position of the enemy, divided his forces likewise into two battalions; that which was designed to oppose the chief Generals he led himself, the other he gave the command of to Alfred.

Whilst the armies were drawing up, though they were in sight of each other, Ethelred retired to his tent and began his customary devotions : Alfred waited with impatience for some time the coming of his Brother ; but at length, unable to restrain any longer his own ardour, and that of his troops, he led them on to the attack, not doubting but that he should soon be properly

perly supported by the King. Ethelred's ill-timed devotion had nearly sacrificed his whole army; for the Danes, observing that the division commanded by Alfred was unassisted by the other body, which continued at a considerable distance waiting for their Leader, they poured their whole force on the young Prince: yet, notwithstanding they had greatly the advantage of the ground, and were much superior in number, the gallant Alfred and his undaunted troops bravely sustained the shock, and withstood their most furious efforts, till his Brother (mass being concluded) came to his relief. As Alfred had been thus able to withstand the Danes unsupported, little assistance was necessary to turn the scale in his favour; they were consequently routed with great slaughter, and obliged to seek for refuge in their fortrefs at Reading. In this battle was slain one of their Leaders, and five Earls, besides an incredible number of their troops; but what that number was cannot now be ascertained, as the persons who

gave the first account of the battles fought in those early ages neither mentioned the number of forces that were engaged in them, or of those that fell.

But this victory was rather a presage of Alfred's future success than of any present advantage, for within fourteen days after the battle of Ashdown, the Danes being reinforced, and making an excursion from Reading, were met by the royal Brothers at Basing in Hampshire : a fierce encounter began, which ended in favour of the invaders ; but as these contests were far from decisive, no great advantage was reaped by either party, besides that of remaining masters of the field : however, both armies meeting soon after at Merdune or Merden *

near

* Some Historians say Merton in Surry, and are followed in this error by several modern Authors ; but is it possible that the Danes, without gaining greater advantages than they had hitherto done, should hasten from the scene of action, and their only retreat Reading, and be able to penetrate to the further part of Wessex ? Dr.

Plott,

near the Devizes in Wiltshire, the English found to their cost that they had a formidable foe to deal with. As it had happened when the Saxons made their first settlement on this island, so now the Danes likewise were continually receiving reinforcements from their native country: allured by the success of their countrymen, fresh shoals arrived in hopes of finding a comfortable establishment, and from a desire of assisting in the conquest of so fertile a kingdom. At the beginning of the engagement the Danes were put into confusion by the English, whose impetuosity it was almost impossible to withstand; but rallying their forces, which were much superior to their

Plott, in his Natural History of Oxfordshire, and Dr. Kennett, in his Parochial Antiquities, suppose it to be Mertune in Oxfordshire; the latter lays great stress on a Danish spur found there, but this is no proof, as several spurs of the same make have been found in other places: a convincing argument that it must have been Merden in Wiltshire is, that the next battle between the Danes and Alfred was fought soon after at Hindon in the same county.

adversaries,

adversaries, they maintained their ground with so much obstinacy, that King Ethelred being mortally wounded, Alfred was obliged to retreat, and had great numbers of his men cut off before he could get to a place of security. Notwithstanding victory thus declared in favour of the Danes, yet Alfred piously defended his wounded Brother, and had him conveyed to Wittingham, where he soon after died, and was buried at Winbourne in Dorsetshire *, having reigned five years, during which he acquired the love of his subjects, by performing the duties of a good King and a valiant warrior.

* Before the civil wars there was a plate in the antient minster of Winbourne with this inscription: IN HOC LOCO QUIESCIT CORPUS SANCTI ÆTHELDREDI, REGIS WEST-SAXONUM, MARTYRIS, QUI ANNO DOMINI DCCCLXXII, DIE APRILIS XXIII, PER MANUS DANORUM PAGANORUM OCCUBUIT. Thus in English: In this place rests the body of St. Ethelred the Martyr, King of the West-Saxons, who was slain by the hands of the Pagan Danes on the twenty-third day of April, in the year of our Lord 872.

Having

Having thus given a sketch of the history of England, from the first landing of the Saxons to the death of Ethelred, which appears a necessary introduction to the reign of Alfred, I shall proceed to collect from the best Authors the circumstances of this great Prince's life; first recounting his heroic actions, and the events of the war he found himself engaged in against foreign invaders; and then recite his talents for the no less arduous employments of peace, his acquirements and promotion of learning, and the regulations he made in the internal police of his country, during those intervals in which he had suppressed for a time his enemies, or when he had at length obliged them totally to evacuate his dominions.

Alfred, by virtue of his Father's will, succeeded his Brother to the throne of England, and was soon after anointed King at Winchester. Nothing but the distracted state of the kingdom, which required an able pilot to conduct it with safety through
the

the storm in which it was involved, could have induced him to accept of the crown; nor was it till after repeated solicitations from the Nobility and Clergy, that he could be prevailed on to take the helm of government. Since his twelfth year he had imbibed a taste for literature, which gave him a turn for that retirement necessary to the pursuit of knowledge; it was therefore with difficulty he could be engaged to dive into the sea of troubles and perplexities, which then particularly furrounded the throne he was pressed to accept. Barbarous and destructive foes, like a torrent, overwhelmed his dominions; they were already in possession of all the northern parts, and were making a grand effort to subdue the kingdom of Wexsex, the only support of the other states. Eight battles which had been fought during the last year, with various success, had not been able to stop their progress; augmented from the overflowing of a populous country, like hydras heads, they were continually increasing; whilst
 England,

England, having been exhausted for many years by its internal divisions, had not the same resources as its spoilers.

However, having once accepted of the regal power, Alfred was not to be daunted by these difficulties; they were necessary to call forth those noble qualities with which his mind was stored, and in the end procured him the title of Great. It is in the hour of danger alone that courage and intrepidity receive their stamp; no laurels spring from the bloodless field; nor till adversity and the frowns of Fortune have meliorated them, will the most splendid endowments and virtues justly entitle the possessor to the name of Great, or acquire him immortal renown. The distressed situation of his kingdom, and the proximity of his enemies, could not deject the noble mind of Alfred; it only excited him to apply with greater ardour and prudence to the management of the war, and the administration of public affairs.

He

He had scarcely performed the funeral obsequies of his Brother, than he found himself obliged to take the field against the Danes, who were advanced as far as Wilton: his forces, though considerably inferior to their adversaries in number, animated by the presence of their young King, had greatly the advantage in an action which soon took place, but imprudently pursuing it too far, the Danes discovered their weakness, and, returning to the combat, drove them out of the field. The intrepidity with which Alfred behaved on this occasion, and the expedition with which he recruited his army, added to the great talents he had already discovered, induced the Danes to propose an accommodation: they offered to give up the places they were in possession of, and to evacuate his dominions, on condition that he would not interrupt their conquests in any other part of the island. However confident of success Alfred might be, he thought it prudent to accept of these terms, as a victory could scarcely

scarcely have procured him more favourable ones, and the loss of another battle might have been attended with fatal consequences ; he therefore consented to the agreement, and had the pleasure to see them direct their course towards the northern parts of the island : but instead of marching into North-
umberland, they turned off and wintered in London, which they had taken during the last reign.

Hinguar was returned to Denmark, and had left the command of the Danish army to his brother Hubba, who being by the late convention restricted from attacking Wessex, and unable to keep his forces in a state of inactivity, turned his arms against Mercia. Buthred, knowing that it was not in his power to resist him, as King Alfred was restrained from affording him any succour, thought it the most eligible method to purchase their lenity with a sum of money, in order to save his country from their depredations. On receipt of the stipulated

I sum

sum they marched for Northumberland, designing to take up their quarters with their countrymen; but provisions being scarce by reason of the devastations they had themselves committed, they were under the necessity of returning once more to Mercia: before they left Northumberland they deposed Egbert, a Saxon, whom they had placed on the throne, and to whom they had given a nominal command, and invested Reistige, a Danish Earl, with the sovereignty.

Buthred, finding they were returned to his dominions, and that they pursued their usual licentious measures, loudly complained of this breach of faith; but, regardless of his murmurs, they compelled him to give them another considerable sum to retrieve his country from the total destruction it was threatened with. No sooner however was the money delivered, than they began plundering with the same insatiable rapacity, till Buthred, tired out with these repeated

repeated breaches of veracity and honour, finding that no ties would bind them, and that even his life was in danger, he abandoned his country and retired to Rome, where he devoted himself to a religious life, seeking for that tranquillity in a convent which the perfidious Pagans would not suffer him to experience on a throne. Mercia being thus without a King, the Danes took possession of that kingdom; but that they might not terrify the Mercians, and drive them to desperation, they set over them Ceolwulph, one of Buthred's domestics. Though the new King was an Englishman, yet the tenure of his power depending on the will of those who had invested him with it, he resolved to enrich himself as fast as possible; so that the unhappy Mercians suffered as much from the rapine and extortion of their countryman, as they could have done from the ravages of a professed enemy.

I 2 Notwithstanding

Notwithstanding the Danes were masters of three kingdoms of the antient heptarchy, Northumberland, East-Anglia, and Mercia, yet they were far from being contented with these territories, though so extensive; they cast a longing eye on Wessex, which contained the other four, but dreading the power of Alfred, they were obliged to suppress their desires, till a favourable opportunity offered of putting their designs upon that kingdom in execution; they therefore began to cultivate the lands they possessed, considering them as their own, and during a short period the nation was free from their ravages: but this calm lasted not long, a storm from the same quarter blew with increased violence, and roused Alfred from the serenity he was just beginning to enjoy.

Haldene, another Danish Chief, fitted out a considerable fleet, on board of which he embarked a great number of troops, and made a descent on East-Anglia, where he
resided

resided during the winter, intending, in the spring, to make an attack on some unconquered part of the island. Alfred, depending on the treaty he had lately made with the Danes, and supposing the whole nation equally under an obligation to abide by it, took no precautions to prevent an infraction of it. Haldene availing himself of this security, early in the spring reembarked his troops, landed on the coast of Wessex, and took by surprize the castle of Wareham, the strongest fortress of that kingdom. The King, astonished at this unexpected breach of treaties, sent remonstrances to the Danish General on the subject; but received for answer, that the several bodies of Danes then settled in the kingdom, being independent of each other, they did not think themselves bound by treaties made with those of a different party. This reply convinced Alfred that arms were his only resource; he accordingly assembled his army, but finding, from the haste at present requisite, as the enemy were now advancing,

that he was not strong enough to encounter them, he concluded a peace upon the best terms circumstances would allow of: what these terms were we are not told, but it is to be supposed that the evacuation of his kingdom, Alfred's principal object, was not purchased at an easy rate from such mercenary plunderers. This application of Alfred to his enemies for a peace has been greatly censured; he has been accused of indolence and the want of circumspection, and it has been considered as a blemish, indeed the only one, in his character; but if we consider his situation at that time, occasioned by his dependence on the late treaty, this concession should rather be looked on as a prudential step, than a mark of indolence or want of spirit: it was the only means by which he could gain time to restore and strengthen his kingdom, before he engaged in fresh wars with a fierce and barbarous people. Taking every method to make this treaty secure, he obliged the Danish Generals to swear not only by their sacred
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bracelets,

bracelets *, agreeable to their own custom, but also by the holy relicks which, as Christians, the Saxons esteemed the most binding oath they could administer.

Notwithstanding these precautions, Alfred again too soon found that men who are devoted to avarice, and subsist by plunder, esteem oaths and hostages as weak ties; for the Danes paid no greater regard to this contract than they had done to the other, but even broke through it before they quitted Wessex. As they were returning towards Mercia they met a party of English horse, who marched in a careless manner, knowing the treaty was signed, and thinking their

* The most solemn manner of swearing among the Danes and other northern nations was, by their arms; it is therefore rather extraordinary, that Alfred should insist upon this people's swearing by relicks, from which, as being yet Pagans, they could not think themselves more firmly bound, than by the oath they were wont to swear: we must consequently suppose, that, knowing their fallacious dispositions, he pursued every method which had the least probability of ensuring their observance of the treaty.

I + apprehensions

apprehensions were at an end: the perfidious Danes, forgetting their recent vows, fell upon them unexpectedly, and put the greatest part of them to the sword; they then mounted some of their own men on the horses, and, instead of pursuing their march, hastened towards the western parts of his dominions, where they surprized the city of Exeter, and, fortifying themselves in it, there passed the winter.

Inexpressible was Alfred's vexation at finding all his attempts to free his subjects from their much dreaded enemies thus frustrated: convinced that it was in vain to enter into treaties with a people who consulted only their own interest, and were insensible to every obligation, he resolved to take more effectual measures to secure himself from their treachery: to this purpose he convened a general assembly of his subjects, and in a nervous speech demonstrated to them, that they had nothing to depend upon but their valour and resolution to deliver them

them from the miseries they had so long laboured under ; that upon so urgent an occasion there was an absolute necessity for venturing their lives in defence of their country, and for sacrificing part of their property to preserve the rest ; in fine, that nothing could secure them from the dreadful calamities the neighbouring nations laboured under, but an unanimous exertion of their patriotism. He then endeavoured to excite a spirit of emulation among his Nobles, and to animate them by his own cheerfulness and fortitude. His remonstrances had the desired effect ; they assured him of their readiness to follow him through every difficulty or danger, and he soon raised a considerable army.

He was now enabled to act with vigour ; marching therefore to Exter, he re-took that city, and bravely engaged the enemy seven times in one campaign ; but not always meeting with the success the bravery of his troops deserved, he was constrained
once

once more to enter into a negotiation with the Danes. Though he knew he could place no dependence on their engagements, he found it the only way to put an end to a war by which his own subjects were continually lessened, whilst the constant supplies his adversaries received prevented any diminution of their forces.

The Danes, however, observed this treaty more punctually than they had done the former; they retired into Mercia, where, being weary of leading such unsettled lives, they incorporated themselves with their countrymen who were settled in that kingdom; they then deposed Ceolwulph, to whom they had given the name of King, and divided the land among themselves. What kind of government they established we know not, as Historians, passing over in silence the civil affairs of the Danes, relate only their wars; but may conclude they introduced their own laws and customs. Thus was the monarchy of
Mercia

Mercia abolished, after having continued three hundred years; and the kingdom of Northumberland, which had lasted three hundred and thirty years, from Ida its first King, underwent a similar revolution.

The West-Saxons were no sooner delivered from the Danes, than the famous Rollo appeared on their coast; but Alfred, grown more circumspect, and not having disbanded the troops with which he had opposed the others, gave him so warm a reception, that he sailed for the coast of France, where he made a settlement, and founded the dukedom of Normandy, as before related. Another reason for his suddenly evacuating this island, without making any more forcible attempts to secure a part of it, may be, that finding the country already despoiled by his countrymen, he chose to seek another, where there was a better prospect of acquiring a greater booty.

After

After Rollo's departure Alfred enjoyed some respite, which gave him an opportunity of contriving how to prevent in future these invasions : he now found by experience, that it was much easier to hinder their landing, than to extirpate them when once they had taken footing. Reflecting on the manifest advantages the enemy derived from their shipping, he resolved to fit out a fleet to encounter them at sea. This step, though it had been the very means which enabled the Saxons to make a conquest of Britain, they had hitherto neglected ; they had suffered the navy which first brought them over to decay, and confined their attention entirely to the reduction of the natives, never apprehending that they might be liable to a retaliation of the wrongs they were then committing ; they consequently took no care to preserve their ships, or to augment their number. But Alfred, more penetrating than his Predecessors, saw the necessity of establishing a naval force ; he therefore set about it with alacrity, and in a short time

time fitted out a respectable fleet : his great difficulty lay in procuring experienced seamen to man his ships ; however, having engaged some Frisian Captains and other pirates to navigate them, he supplied the deficiency with the most docile of his landsmen. As the Danes had no apprehensions of meeting with any opposition in their passage to England, their ships were only unwieldy transports, and not fit to stand an engagement ; but Alfred contrived his entirely for service, so that one of them was able to cope with numbers.

It was not long before he reaped the benefit of his attention to this mode of defence, for his fleet meeting with six large Danish vessels full of troops, they took one and dispersed the rest. This first naval victory was soon followed by one much more considerable, an hundred and twenty sail of smaller ships, making to the shore to land their men, were attacked by Alfred's fleet, and the greatest part of them destroyed.

The

The Danes were now masters of all England north of the Thames, yet they found even that extensive tract too small for their support, as, notwithstanding the vigilance of Alfred's Officers at sea, they could not prevent great numbers from landing, who, like locusts, covered almost the whole island and devoured its fruits. No bounds or treaties could any longer restrain them, they determined to unite, and make one general effort against the parts that remained unconquered: in consequence of this resolution, Haldene sent one of his Brothers with a fleet to make a descent in the West, whilst Guthrun, another of their Chieftains, attacked the nearest borders of Alfred's dominions before he could put himself in a posture of defence. The latter marched directly to Chippenham, one of the strongest and most considerable cities belonging to the West-Saxons, and, reducing it in a few days, over-ran the adjacent country.

The

The English, greatly weakened by the various battles they had fought, and dispirited by these repeated invasions, of which they saw no end, had for some time been preserved from destruction, rather by the reputation of their Prince, and the credit of their former achievements, than by the real power which still survived in them; the opposition they had lately made both by sea and land, were like the convulsive struggles of expiring nature which forebode dissolution; this new inundation therefore threw down every support, and overwhelmed them with despair. Those who could not fly submitted to the victors, and preserved their lives at the expence of their happiness; others fled into Wales, in order to secret themselves till some happy revolution should restore them to their country; whilst a few, unwilling to abandon their Sovereign in his adversity, surrounded him with professions of loyalty and affection. Alfred alone rose superior to this severe attack of Fortune; with that magnanimity which the truly
brave

brave ever experience in the hour of danger, instead of giving way to despair, and retiring to a cloister as his uncle Buthred, King of Mercia, had done, he determined to yield to the storm for a while, and wait the rise of more auspicious stars, without forgetting for a moment his peoples welfare.

The security of his family gave him the most pungent concern. He had early married Elswitha, Daughter of Ethelred, a Saxon Earl, surnamed for his merit the Great, and of Eadburgha, his Wife, descended from the Kings of Mercia: this Lady, who by her birth, accomplishments, and beauty, was worthy of the high station to which he had raised her, Alfred loved with the sincerest affection, and had the happiness to find his love returned with equal sincerity. Heaven had already blessed them with several children, and they began to rejoice in the prospect of a numerous progeny. How distressing therefore must his situation be, when this anxiety was added to his apprehensions

hensions for his unhappy subjects ! but there was no alternative ; he must either submit to a temporary separation from the objects of his tenderness, or run the risk of becoming a prey to his savage and inexorable enemies, whom it was now impossible for him to withstand. The former he prudently chose ; and after having placed his family in the most eligible security the times would allow off, till he could find a more secure retreat for them, he disguised himself in mean attire, and entered into the service of the person who had the care of his herds.

Whether he was known to the neat-herd, and depended on his confidence, is uncertain, but that he remained unknown to the peasant's wife, is certified by the following incident related by Affer Menevenfis : the disguised King being one day sitting by the fire absorbed in thought, he suffered a cake, which his mistress had placed before it, to burn, notwithstanding she had given him orders to

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take

take care of it: the old woman severely reprimanded him for the neglect, telling him, that, though he would not trouble himself to turn it, yet he would eat it fast enough when ready. What a situation for a once potent Monarch! but Heaven designed, by these trials of his fortitude, to accustom his mind to the natural vicissitudes of life, and to give him that equal temper which afterwards enabled him to bear prosperity with the moderation of a man and a christian.

Alfred had not remained long in this wretched situation, before he observed, at some little distance from the place where he resided, a spot of land containing a few acres, which was rendered inaccessible by the conflux of the rivers Parret and Thone on each side, and an extensive morass in the front: though forced to withdraw and shelter himself from the violence of the storm, his courage was inexhaustible, and his thoughts were continually employed in devising means to annoy his enemies, as well as to
forward

forward his restoration: it therefore struck him, that this place, which was impervious from the surrounding woods and fens, could he build a small fortress on it *, would serve him for a secure retreat, from whence he might frequently sally to attack the nearest stations of the Danes. He accordingly found means to inform a few of his most faithful adherents of his plan, and, collecting as many as the confined spot would admit of, carried his designs into execution.

* Some Authors, among whom is Rapin, omit this circumstance of Alfred's being able to build a fort, and from it to molest his enemies; nor is it altogether probable, as by that means he run a great risk of being discovered: they say he lay concealed even from the knowledge of his friends, till after the victory of the Earl of Devon. The accounts of the transactions of those ages are so contradictory and incomplete, that it is with the greatest difficulty the narrative can be carried on with any degree of uniformity, or that a Writer can avoid frequently relating palpable contradictions.

His first attention, after he had completed the building *, was to remove his family to it; this he did by the assistance of the Nobleman to whose care he had committed them, and who privately conveyed them to the arms of the anxious Alfred. His thoughts being now centered on the annoyance of his foes, he made frequent excursions, and, stealing on them with his small but brave party, he gave the Danes such demonstrations of valour as served to convince them, that though he was overpowered by their multitudes, they were not yet to consider him as totally overcome. Malmfbury thus describes his present situation :

* When Alfred was restored to his throne, he built a stronger castle on this spot, which then acquired the name of Æthelingey, that is, the Isle of Nobles, from the frequent resort and residence of the Noblemen who attended there on the King. That Monarch always held the place in great veneration, on account of the security he had found in it, and afterwards dedicated it to his Preserver, by building a monastery on it; the principal method used at that time by the rich and great to express their gratitude to Heaven. It is situated about four miles from Bridgewater in Somersetshire, and now called Athelney.

“ Alfred,

“ Alfred, even when he was overthrown
 “ and cast down, was always new to be en-
 “ countered with ; so that when one would
 “ think him trodden to pieces, he, like a
 “ snake slipping out of the hands of them
 “ that held him, would, from his hiding-
 “ places, on the sudden set upon the
 “ triumphing enemy ; and, after an over-
 “ throw, his fury was for the most part in-
 “ supportable.”

The greatest inconvenience Alfred la-
 boured under in this retired place arose
 from a scarcity of provisions, of which the
 following story, told by all the old Histo-
 rians, is a proof : It happened one day dur-
 ing the winter, which proved uncommonly
 severe, that he had sent all his attendants
 out to endeavour to procure fish, or some
 kind of provisions ; so difficult was the en-
 terprize esteemed, that the King and Queen
 only were excused from the employment.
 When they were gone, the King, as was his
 custom whenever he had an opportunity,

took a book and began reading, whilst Elswitha was employed in her domestic concerns : they had not long continued thus engaged, before a poor pilgrim, accidentally passing that way, knocked at the gate, and begged they would give him something to eat. The humane King called to Elswitha, and desired her to give the poor man part of what provision there was in the fort : the Queen finding only one loaf, brought it to Alfred to shew how slender their store was, at the same time representing to him the distresses the family would labour under, should they return from their foraging unsuccessful. The King, not deterred by the scanty view from his charitable purposes, but rather internally rejoicing at this trial of his humanity, cheerfully gave the poor Christian one-half of the loaf, consoling the Queen with this religious reflection, That he who could feed five thousand with five loaves and two fishes, could make (if it so pleased him) that half of the loaf suffice for more than their necessities. When the traveller

veller was departed the King returned to his reading, and felt that satisfaction which most surely results from the performance of a beneficent action ; nor was it long unrewarded, for his companions returned with so great a quantity of provisions, that they were not exposed to any similar inconveniences during their seclusion.

As most of the Writers of that age were Monks, they passed over no extraordinary event without introducing an apparition or a miracle, several of them have therefore made the following addition to this story :
 “ The poor man being departed, the King went on with his reading ; at length wearied, and wanting some relief from his cares, he fell asleep, and dreamed that St. Cuthbert came to him, and told him that he was sent by God to let him know, that the long continued afflictions which the English had deservedly suffered for their sins, had now moved him to compassion ; that taking in good part his liberal alms that

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day, he had determined to restore him to his throne ; and that in token thereof, his servants, who in that unseasonable weather were gone a fishing, should return in the evening with so great a quantity of fish, that it should both surprize him, and convince him of the truth of this prediction. The King awaking, called to the Queen, and told her his dream ; who, having likewise fallen asleep at the same instant, and was just awakened at his voice, assured him that she had dreamed the same thing. Whilst they sat conversing of so singular an incident, their servants came home with such an incredible quantity of fish, as appeared sufficient to have fed an army *.

* Vide Sir John Spelman's Life of Alfred ; only in the room of the King's Mother, whom he supposes to have been with him, I have substituted the Queen, to preserve some degree of probability, as Alfred's Mother, Ethelwulph's first Wife, had long been dead ; and Judith, his Mother-in-law, being married to the Earl of Flanders, as already recited, was at that time with her Husband.

For

For more than a year Alfred remained enveloped by this cloud of adversity, and bore with resignation the lot assigned him; but as a patient perseverance in every laudable purpose, will meet with the assistance necessary to its completion, though there are no means for its accomplishment visible, an unseen hand was secretly contributing to his restoration, and to the destruction of his enemies. Hubba, who commanded the Danish army in the absence of his brother Hinguar, had invaded Wales, and spread desolation throughout the dominions of the unfortunate Britons. Finding no longer employment there, he passed over into Devonshire, part of the kingdom of Wessex, and landed his forces near Barnstable.

Oddune Earl of Devonshire, who continued faithful to Alfred during his reverse of fortune, collected a few brave men who also retained their loyalty, and threw himself, to avoid the first shock of Danish fury, into Kenwith castle, situated on the mouth
of

of the river Taw. Hubba, thinking it prudent to remove this obstruction to his progress, laid siege to the castle; which he did with the greater confidence, as he learned that the garrison consisted of an inconsiderable number of troops, and these badly provided with necessaries to withstand a siege. The Earl of Devon was himself sensible that it would not be in his power, with the most vigorous exertion of their courage, to hold out against so formidable an enemy; he therefore called his men around him, and, after pointing out to them the extreme danger they were in of falling into the hands of the merciless Pagans, assured them they had only one way to escape, which was by opening to themselves a passage with their swords through their adversary's army: he represented to them, that this enterprize was not so rash and desperate as they might imagine, the Danes being undoubtedly negligent and secure, from contempt of so small a body of men pent up within walls; that therefore what he proposed was far
from

from impracticable, if put in execution before their opponents were alarmed ; and that even should they be unable to effect their designs, they only ventured their lives and liberties, which must inevitably be sacrificed if they continued in the castle. This harangue so encouraged the besieged, that, without further deliberation, they sallied out sword in hand, and by this sudden and furious attack put the Danes into extreme disorder. This happy beginning made them forget their first design of only gaining a passage, and inspired them with a resolution to pursue their advantage ; they continued therefore to press the Danes with increased impetuosity, not giving them time to recover from their surprize, till they had dispersed them with incredible slaughter.

Among the slain was Hubba, the Danish General ; but what seems to be of greater importance, and to have contributed more to the dispersion of the invaders than even the death of their Commander, was, that
his

his famous magical standard named Reafen, or the Raven, fell into the hands of the English. The Danes implicitly believed that there was a secret virtue in this standard, and placed great confidence in it: an image of a raven was embroidered on it, wrought by the three Sisters of Hinguar and Hubba, on purpose for their expedition against the murderers of their father Lodebroch; and it is said to have been magically made almost in an instant, being begun and finished in a noon-tide. By the help of a strong fancy, or the delusion of evil spirits, the Danes imagined they saw the raven, before a battle which was to be attended with success, clap his wings in token of victory, or droop and hang down his head as a presage of their defeat.

The news of the Earl's victory, and the death of the Danish General, having reached Alfred in his retirement, he felt a secret assurance of success, and immediately began to consider how to make this fortunate inci-

dent conducive to it: he informed his friends of the place of his retreat, and desired they would come to him, that he might reap the benefit of their advice at this critical juncture. This invitation was readily accepted by many Noblemen, and the prospect of being once more commanded by a King whom they loved and honoured, gave them inexpressible joy. After he had conferred with them, and received their congratulations and advice, he ordered them to separate, and to collect with the utmost expedition all the troops they were able, keeping them in small bodies to prevent suspicion, but to be ready to join each other at his command.

The most difficult as well as the most important part of his plan remained yet to be executed; that was, to gain intelligence of the posture of the enemy who were still encamped in his kingdom, that measures may be concerted accordingly. Alfred, not knowing on whom he could rely in the execution

cution of a point which required so much prudence and penetration, took the boldest resolution that ever entered into the head of a Prince; he resolved to venture into the camp of his enemies, that he might be informed with certainty of their position and strength: to this end, having disguised himself and taken a harp in his hand, as if he got a livelihood by playing on that instrument, he entered the Danish camp, and staid there several days; for minstrels found a ready admittance wherever they came: he was even admitted into the tent of their General, was apprized of their most secret measures, and made himself master of the situation and defects both of their camp and discipline. Having further learned, that they were soon to celebrate a grand festival in honour of one of their idols, he determined to take advantage of the riot and inebriety of that day. Fraught with this intelligence, he returned to his Nobles at Athelney, and recommending to them secrecy and expedition, appointed Selwood Forest for the general rendezvous of all his troops.

On

On the day appointed he met his army at Brixton, on the eastern borders of the wood, and was received by them with inconceivable raptures; his troops welcomed the return of their long lost King with tears of joy, and instantaneously formed resolutions of sacrificing their lives in his future defence. The whole of this transaction was carried on so expeditiously and with such secrecy, that on the third day they came within sight of the Danes, who were employed in their sports at Edington in Hampshire, which lay at some distance from their strong fortified camp, and who were consequently thrown into the utmost consternation when they saw, on a sudden, the English army approaching to attack them. Alfred, sensible of the advantages this panic gave him, was unwilling to allow them time to recover from their surprize; he therefore exhorted his men, in a few words, not to have the least dread of an enemy already vanquished by their fears, and then gave the signal for
the

the attack. Exhortations were needless to troops animated by the presence of their beloved King, and encouraged by his example; they fought like men determined to conquer or to die: nevertheless, though the Danes were assaulted thus unexpectedly, they defended themselves with a great deal of resolution; but whether they had not time to form themselves into their usual battalions, or whether the loss of their standard had possessed them with a notion that their Gods were averse to their cause, they were at length entirely routed, and almost their whole army cut to pieces: the few that escaped betook themselves to an adjacent castle, where Alfred pursued them, and, before they could recover from their consternation, pressed them so briskly that they were soon brought to capitulate.

Notwithstanding the great advantage he had just gained, the English Monarch treated the Danes with his usual lenity; such of them as would embrace the Christian religion he permitted

permitted to take possession of the kingdom of East-Anglia, on condition that they should oblige the rest of their countrymen to quit the island, and prevent, as much as lay in their power, any more foreigners from landing : hostages were given for the performance of these articles, and such as would not part with their old religion embarked for Flanders, where they exercised their usual piracies.

Guthrum, who had been appointed by Hubba Governor of East-Anglia, and since the death of that Prince commanded the Danish army, agreed to these conditions, and came to Alfred's camp with thirty of his principal Officers. From thence the King retired with his new converts to Auler, a small village in Somersetshire, not far from Althelney, where they were all baptized with great pomp, Alfred himself standing Godfather to the Danish Chief, to whom he gave the name of Athelston; after which he entertained them with great magnificence

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for

for twelve days at Wedmore, and on their departure presented them with many gifts, which were proportioned rather to the distressed situation of his finances, than to his expanded heart.

By this great and important victory, Alfred found himself, on a sudden, restored to a situation exceeding even his most sanguine hopes: by one single battle he had driven the Danes from his kingdom, and regained entire possession of it. His scattered subjects, whom fear had driven from their homes, or constrained to submit to the enemy, now flocked with eagerness to renew their allegiance to him. Wishing further to secure the friendship of Guthrum, whom he had not only overcome by his arms, but by his courtesy, Alfred gave him the kingdom of East-Anglia, which was now inhabited entirely by Danes, reserving to himself the nominal sovereignty as Monarch of all England.

After

After this investiture the Dane retired to his dominions, where he divided the lands among his countrymen, and exercised the regal authority as long as he lived. It must be observed, that at the time of the late battle there were in England two sorts of Danes, those that were already settled in the kingdoms of Northumberland, Mercia, and East-Anglia, and those who were endeavouring to procure themselves habitations. With these last it was that Alfred now treated; the former, after they had seen their brethren so roughly handled, thought themselves happy in being able to preserve their present possessions; as the fortune of war is uncertain, they chose rather to sit down contented, and to acknowledge him for their Sovereign, than to run the risk of losing what they were at present possessed of, by a desire to increase their substance: accordingly the Danes settled in the three kingdoms submitted to Alfred, and swore allegiance to him, consenting, at the same time, to admit those of their countrymen

who embraced the Christian faith to a share of their territories. The tenderness these new converts now felt for the lives of their hostages, which had been delivered up on the conclusion of this treaty, the admiration and dread which they entertained for the amiable virtues and warlike abilities of their conqueror, and the influence which the humanizing doctrines of the Christian religion had upon their conduct, all these united seemed to have polished, in a great degree, their former savage manners; and though there were many among them that could not be civilized, and still retaining a veneration for their antient customs and religion submitted reluctantly to these regulations, yet the greater part applied themselves to improving the land which was allotted to them: houses were consequently built, private property defended, virtue and industry encouraged, and every precaution taken to defend themselves from the incroachments of their countrymen, or the invasion of foreigners.

This

This was in a great measure owing to Alfred, whose benevolence was extensive and unconfined: he not only furnished these emigrants with places of abode, but he presented them with a short code of laws * for the regulation of their government, and the security of their present happiness. The contents of this short but valuable collection may be divided into two parts; the first re-

* This code of laws was given at two separate times; the first is intitled *FCÆDUS ALUREDI & GUTHRUMNI*, and was only a short provision for present contingencies, until a more copious system could be drawn up, for the perfect union and security of the whole island. The other is termed *FCÆDUS EDOVARDI & GUTHRUMNI*; but though this ordinance is denominated, among the laws of the Saxon Kings collected by Mr. Lambard *FCÆDUS EDOVARDI*, yet it must be considered as Alfred's law and not Edward's, notwithstanding Edward, Alfred's eldest Son, to add weight to its authority, joined in signing it. The title in the original Saxon is, *The ordinance which first King Alfred, and then King Edward and King Guthrum made, when the English and Danes fully betook themselves to peace and friendship.* Now as this happened in Alfred's life-time, and Guthrum died at least ten years before Edward came to the throne, it is certain that there is an impropriety in the title, as copied by Mr. Lambard.

specting religion and morals, the second the limits of their respective territories, and the intercourse between the two nations: but as this was only a compendium of a more extensive plan framed by him when he had greater leisure, for the general good of all his subjects, I shall defer giving the particulars of it. Few and simple as these institutions were, they had the desired effect in civilizing this barbarous people, and in keeping the kingdom in tranquillity for a considerable time.

Alfred soon became possessed of a greater extent of territory, and invested with more unbounded sway than any of his Predecessors had enjoyed; every Sovereign within the island either courting his friendship, or suing for his protection: the Princes of South-Wales had submitted to him some time before; and the eldest Son of Roderic, Prince of North-Wales, waited now upon him to pay him homage for his principality, and acknowledged him as his Sovereign: the
Northumbrians

Northumbrians also being by the death of Haldene, who was slain in the late battle, without a King, desired him to nominate one to rule over them; and gladly acquiesced in his choice of Guthred, a person of Danish extraction, but an Englishman by birth, and a Christian,

Hitherto the English had acted only on the defensive; exposed to the continual invasions of the Danes, and uncertain where they would land, they were generally surprized before it was in their power to defend themselves, Alfred having now peace and leisure, determined to find some effectual remedy against these incursions, and not only to put his sea coasts, which were at this time quite deserted, into a proper state of defence, but to equip a formidable fleet, the advantages of which he had already experienced.

Before these resolutions could be carried into execution, a party of Danes who had

followed Hastings on his expedition to Flanders, after having pillaged the Netherlands, Picardy, Hainault, and Artois, returned to England : they landed on the coast of Kent, and advancing towards Rochester, laid siege to that city, in full expectation of being able to get possession of it by surprize, as they had been accustomed to do. But the city being provided with a strong garrison, and Alfred, who had now always an army in readiness, hastening that way on the first news of their landing, they were so intimidated that they retired with the utmost precipitation to their ships, leaving the horses they had brought from France and all their prisoners behind them. The watchfulness of Alfred having prevented their designs on England, they returned to France, where, having joined their companions, they continued their devastations on that kingdom.

After this victory, Alfred having greatly increased his fleet, he resolved to fall upon the Danish pirates that still infested his coast,

coast, and were sheltered by the East-Angles. It was not long before his Admiral discovered sixteen sail in the port of Harwich, thirteen of which he took, and having destroyed the rest, returned with a considerable booty. Guthrum, who was far from being grateful to the English Monarch for the favours he had bestowed upon him, incensed at this defeat of his countrymen, and at an act of hostility committed in one of his harbours, privately assisted the sufferers in taking revenge for their loss. It was not long before they found an opportunity to do this, by attacking in the night some of the King's ships, over which they gained some advantage; but this defeat turned at length to the real benefit of the English, as it served to render them more vigilant for the future.

Having now secured his coasts, Alfred diligently set about fortifying the rest of his kingdom with castles and walled towns, the

want of which had greatly contributed to the success of the Danes ; he repaired those that were gone to ruin, and built others in so strong a manner that they could not easily be taken. The only avenue which now remained at the mercy of the enemy, was the river Thames, which always gave them an opportunity to penetrate into his kingdom, whilst they were in possession of the city of London. This consideration induced him to lay siege to it, as it was in the hands of a body of Danes who were lately arrived. He undertook this the more readily, as he knew the party was not very considerable, and that it was not in a condition to resist him long : according to his expectations, the besieged were in a few weeks obliged to capitulate.

He was no sooner in possession of it, than he rebuilt it in a much more regular manner, adding many strong works to its fortifications,

fortifications *, and then assigned the government of it to Ethelred, who afterwards married his daughter Ethelflida; creating him at the same time Earl of Mercia. This Earl was both a great Statesman and an experienced General; nor was he less illustrious for his virtues than for his abilities; which induced the King, who was a perfect judge of mankind, and always ready to shew his approbation of the worthy and the brave, to bestow on him his Daughter: by the mildness of his government, this Nobleman engaged the Danes as well as the English to put themselves under his protection, and to re-people the city. By creating Ethelred Earl of Mercia, the King did not invest him with any power over Mercia, but only over the city of London; all the

* The walls which then encompassed the city of London, and which have withstood the ravages of time and of improvements till within some few years, are said to have been built by Constantine the Roman Emperor, at the request of his mother Helena, and contained within them an oblong space of three miles in compass.

rest of Mercia was still in the hands of the Danes, over whom he asserted no other right than that of nominal sovereignty, which since his late victory they had consented to acknowledge; Ethelred therefore was honoured with an empty title, till by his valour he afterwards became master of great part of that province.

Alfred had now the satisfaction to see peace and tranquillity restored to this island, after so many years of bloodshed and disquietude. During this calm, which lasted about eight years, this wise and good Monarch employed himself in rectifying the disorders introduced by so long a war, and in making such regulations as tended to render his people happy: but as his great designs were not brought to perfection till the Danes (excepting those who were now become denizens) were entirely expelled, and as the foundation of the improvements he afterwards completed was only now laid, I shall proceed to finish the detail of their incursions,

curfions, that we may quit the unpleafant track we have fo long been in—an uninterrupted recital of war and bloodfhed; which, though neceffary to be told as it conftitutes fo confiderable a part of the hiftory, yet difpleafes from its uniformity.

In the year 892 the Danes under the conduct of Haftings returned again to England: they had continued their ravages through the kingdom of France, and the Low Countries, where they acquired prodigious booty; but at length, being twice defeated by Eudes and Arnulph, Kings of France and Germany, they refolved to return into England: for this purpofe they fitted out three hundred fhips, which they divided into two fleets; with one of them, confifting of two hundred fail, they bent their courfe towards Kent, and landed at Appledore, at that time a confiderable place; the other, commanded by Haftings himfelf, failed up the river Thames: that General landing at Middleton, now Milton, built a
fort

fort there, and another at Bemfleet, from whence he issued and committed depredations on the adjacent country.

Several circumstances concurred to favour the designs of these new invaders: in the first place, the death of Guthrum, which had happened about two years before their landing, greatly contributed towards it, as it partly removed the restraints by which the Danes settled in East-Anglia were prevented from exercising their favourite depredations: Guthred, King of Northumberland, dying likewise about this time, who, as well as Guthrum, had continued during their lives in amity with King Alfred, another obstacle was removed; and the Danes in these parts also were left at liberty to favour the attempts of their countrymen. That they were ready to seize the first opportunity of doing this, their fitting out two fleets to make a diversion in favour of those who were newly arrived, fully proves: with these they plundered the coasts as they proceeded,

ceeded, and at length, landing in Devonshire, invested Exeter.

The measures Alfred had taken during the late interval of peace for the security of his dominions, greatly obstructed the designs of these invaders; but they were so exceedingly numerous, that it was impossible to prevent their making some progress, especially as the King happened then to be in East-Anglia, where he was engaged in settling the affairs of that kingdom on account of the death of Guthrum. Many were the encounters which happened whilst these invaders continued their ravages, in most of which Alfred was successful; but the circumstances of this war are related so confusedly by the Historians, that it is almost impracticable to give an account of them with perspicuity. This probably was occasioned by the confusion which reigned throughout the kingdom, whilst several bodies of the enemy were ravaging it in different places at the same time; and a war undertaken

undertaken for the sake of plunder can have but little regularity in it: accordingly we find in their histories the names of the Danish Leaders often confounded; and events perplexed. I shall therefore relate such of them only as appear the most material and authentic.

When Alfred heard of this fresh invasion of his territories, he returned into Wessex; having first obliged the most governable part of the Danes inhabiting Northumberland and East-Anglia to renew their oath of allegiance: then drawing his troops together, he marched to oppose the two armies that had landed with Hastings, and were strongly encamped * near each other in the county of Kent, taking his station in such a manner as to prevent their junction. In this position

* It was customary both for the Danes and Saxons, in imitation of the Romans, to take their stations on some elevated place, and to surround their camp with very strong intrenchments; the remains of many are still visible throughout the kingdom.

the three armies continued for some time, and remained inactive ; nor durst the Danes, notwithstanding their great superiority, attack the English intrenchments : they however sometimes issued out in small parties to pillage, according to their usual practice, but always met with so different a reception now from what they had done in their former incursions, every place being well garrisoned, and the inhabitants enured to arms, that they were driven back with great loss : therefore neither daring to assail the King's camp, nor to pursue their usual method of foraging, they hastily decamped, and marched with the utmost expedition to the island of Mersey, at the mouth of the river of Colchester, where their vessels lay.

Alfred, finding it impossible to overtake them, hastened to attack another body, of which he had received intelligence, that was marching to Appledore to embark on board the ships they had left in that port : these he intercepted near Farnham, and, defeating

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them,

them, took all their baggage. He then marched into Devonshire, to oppose the Northumbrian and East-Anglian Danes who had invested Exeter, but before his arrival they had made themselves masters of that place; he however retook it, notwithstanding several desperate sallies they made, and obliged them to take to their ships and join their countrymen in Essex.

In the mean time his Son-in-law, the Earl of Mercia, hearing that the Danish General, Hastings, was marched out with a body of forces to forage on the borders of Mercia, he took the advantage of his absence to attack his fort at Bemfleet, which he carried by storm. The booty he found in this place, among which were the Wife and two Sons of the Danish Chief, was very considerable; but the latter, Alfred with his usual benignity sent back, and at the same time this message, "That he released them, because he did not make war
" on

“ on women or Christians.” Hastings, overcome by this generous act, or by the force of Alfred’s arms, which he had found to his cost much more respectable than on his first invasion, or which is most probable, to deceive him by a feigned treaty whilst he took some advantage, voluntarily applied to the English Monarch, and sued for peace. Alfred, ever ready to put a stop to the desolations and effusion of blood which war occasions, granted his request on very reasonable terms, and stood Godfather with Ethelred to his two Sons, who were then baptized at their Father’s desire. However he received another convincing proof, which the goodness of his own heart, though often deceived, would not permit him to suspect, that there was no faith to be expected from a Dane; for Hastings had scarcely repassed the Thames than he made unexpectedly an irruption into Mercia, spreading, as usual, desolation around him: he then joined the other Danish armies, and, after various

encounters, fortified himself strongly at Chester.

In the following summer, after many incursions into different parts of the island, which were so sudden and opposite that Alfred could not guard against them, they at one time removed their station to Hertford, on the river Lea, where they drew their ships up the stream, and erected forts on each side for their security. The citizens of London, apprehensive of suffering from their proximity, marched in a great body to drive them from their works; but finding the undertaking more difficult than they expected, they were obliged to return with some loss: this repulse induced the King himself to encamp near them during the time of harvest, with a body of troops, to secure the labourers from interruption. One day, as Alfred rode along the banks of the river, his fertile imagination suggested to him, that it would be possible, by either turning the stream, or by widening the mouth of
the

the river, to leave the Danish vessels dry. One of these methods *, but which is uncertain, he made use of; it succeeded to his wish, and the Danes were consequently obliged to abandon their forts and ships. Being thus bereft of the use of their navy, and all means of procuring supplies, through the vigilance of their opponent, they suddenly returned to the western part of the kingdom, and built a fort at Quatbridge, now Bridgenorth, whither Alfred pursued them. Thus hunted by a Prince who would not give them time to breathe after their defeats, distressed for want of succours, the seas being guarded by the English fleet, disheartened by a series of calamities, and exposed to a dreadful plague and mortality both of man

* Spelman says, that Alfred made use of the latter method; and opening the mouth of the river Lea into three branches drained the stream so low, that their ships lay on dry ground. He adds, that it is not improbable, but that the cutting of the river in this manner may be the first cause of gaining, by the contraction, that extensive level of rich meadow and pasture land which lies between Hertford and Bow.

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and beast, which for three years raged through the land, they returned to Normandy without having taken one fortified town, or made one successful incursion during the time they continued on the island.

Hastings, tired of this expedition, and despairing of meeting with better success on the neighbouring coasts, as all the maritime powers were now upon their guard against him, resolved to steer his course where he should not be expected, and therefore sailed for the Mediterranean : on his arrival he found means, by an impious and perfidious stratagem, to gain possession of Luna, a city situated on the coast of Tuscany. He pretended he was desirous of becoming a Christian; a bait which could not fail of taking with persons so exceedingly zealous in making converts as the Italian Clergy; accordingly he was baptized by the Bishop of the place, who readily came to him for that purpose. A few days after, the Bishop

was informed that his new convert was departed this life, and that he died like a good Christian, earnestly desiring to be buried in the church of Luna, to which he had bequeathed a considerable legacy. By this crafty device, a great number of Danes, under pretence of attending the funeral, entered the city; which they had no sooner done, than they fell on the inhabitants, murdering and plundering them with their usual rapacity. After having brought so many miseries on England, France, and the Netherlands, this celebrated Chieftain chose for his retirement the city of Chartres, situated about forty-two miles from Paris, which Charles the Simple presented him with to put a stop to his ravages, and in which he ended his days in peace, after having spent the greatest part of his life in cruelty and rapine.

The Danes that refused to go with Hastings when he left England, put themselves under the command of Sigefert, a famous

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Northumbrian

Northumbrian Pirate, and for some time they also committed some ravages on the coast of Wessex, without daring to advance far into the country, as they were so few in number; tired however at length with this unsuccessful scheme, they failed off to seek their fortune elsewhere.

After their departure, Alfred found no great difficulty in reducing the East-Anglian and Northumbrian Danes: the inhabitants of these kingdoms, finding they were deprived, by the King's wise precautions, of all hopes of any further succours from their countrymen, they prudently bethought themselves once more how to secure their present possessions. The continuance of the war was so far from being likely to increase their advantages, that they had reason to fear it might be the occasion of their losing what they already had; and, supposing they could have maintained their independence by their swords, yet this method would have prevented them from cultivating the land,

or

or following any useful employments ; these considerations induced them to submit to Alfred, who, being convinced by experience of the ill consequences which resulted from governing them by feudatory Kings, took them under his own immediate authority and administration.

The people inhabiting South-Wales, who had been much harrassed by the Danes, finding themselves in no condition to resist the increased power of Alfred, became again his tributaries ; they had submitted to him in the former part of his reign, but during the late troubles they had thrown off their obedience. The inhabitants also of North-Wales, having taken the same advantage, now returned to their duty : they were a fierce and ungovernable people, but, awed by the fame of Alfred, they continued quiet during his reign ; however, secured by the rigidity of their country, they were not absolutely reduced till the reign of Edward the First, two hundred years after the Norman

man conquest. It is said by some Historians, that the King of Scotland paid him homage also ; but this appears to be a disputable point : certain it is, that Gregor their King aided him in his wars, and that Donald, the Successor of that Prince, assisted him with five thousand horse, and died in his service.

Alfred, being at length freed from his enemies, passed the remainder of his days in profound tranquillity, except that it was sometimes interrupted by the cursory attacks of the Danish pirates, who still infested the seas ; but being soon overtaken by the English fleet, which was always on the watch, they were either dispersed or destroyed.

We now see this great Prince reaping the reward of all his toils ; like another Hercules, he had subdued, by his prudence and valour, dangers apparently insurmountable ; and though his enemies assumed as
many

many shapes as Achelous had done, varying, like him, their attacks, and pouring innumerable forces upon him from all quarters, yet by his steadiness and perseverance he effectually overcame every difficulty, and raised himself to an eminence unknown to any of his Ancestors ; for, having repelled the invaders of his dominions, or reduced them to a state of submission, he consolidated the broken reliques of the Saxon heptarchy into an absolute monarchy, and became the sole Sovereign * of the island.

* Alfred is thus addressed in his life-time by Affer, Archbishop of St. David's, in the dedication prefixed to his annals : " To the most venerable Lord, and the most pious Governor of all the Christians of the Isle of Britain, Alfred, King of the English Saxons." And though the dissolution of the heptarchy is supposed to have taken place during the reign of Egbert, yet, as Ella and Osbert, the two last Kings of Northumberland, with Edmund, King of East-Anglia, retained their power till they were slain, which happened in the reign of Ethelbert, the immediate predecessor of Alfred, and Buthred, the last King of the Mercians, was not expelled till about the third year of King Alfred, this Prince might properly be stiled the first Monarch of all England.

We

We have hitherto viewed this Prince as a warrior only, in which character he certainly rivals any of those whose names have been immortalized for their warlike achievements. Such an uninterrupted succession of encounters with such formidable foes perhaps never fell, in so short a time, to the share of a Monarch who only fought in defence of his country, and was not ambitious of the title of Conqueror. But amidst all these trials of his fortitude, he preserved an equanimity that does him honour: whether crowned with conquest, or vanquished and overthrown, whether surrounded by his Nobles and enjoying the blessings of prosperity, or obliged to abandon his throne and seek for shelter in obscurity, he shewed on all occasions signal marks of intrepidity and military skill; whilst in every situation, an unabating ardour for the good of his subjects and the establishment of that religion to which he lived an ornament, actuated every thought.

It

It is now time to commemorate his gentler virtues, and take a view of him in a less striking, though not a less pleasing, light; as a just, learned, and religious Prince, a lover of his country, and an indefatigable promoter of arts, sciences, justice, and religion. I shall begin with the regulations he made, and the laws he framed for the government of his people. He was no sooner established on his throne, than he began to enlarge that system which he had hastily drawn up for the use of Guthrum, on giving him the kingdom of East-Anglia; now regularly digesting and extending them, that they might prove beneficial to all his subjects. During the late war, which had been one continued scene of rapine and depredation, all distinction of property had been nearly lost, and the administration of the laws then in force greatly obstructed; but when the sword was sheathed, and Alfred had resumed the sceptre, he applied himself without intermission to the re-establishment

blishment of justice and equity throughout his dominions.

His body of laws were collected with the greatest judgment from the sacred scriptures, from those of Ina, Offa, and Ethelbert, the greatest Lawgivers among the Saxon Kings, as well as from the usages of the various nations that had inhabited Britain. From the underneath verses * in Harding's Chronicle, written on the authority of Geoffrey of Monmouth, Alfred is supposed to have also engrafted into his system some of the laws of the Trojans and Grecians, which he translated himself for that purpose; nor is this without some degree of probability, for Camden has evidently proved, that the

* Kyng Aluered the lawes of Troye and Brute
Lawes Woluntynes, and Marcians congregate
With Danylshe lawes that were well constitute
And Grekyshe als, well made and approbate
In Englyshe tong he did hem alle translate
Whiche yit ben called the lawes of Aluered.
At Westmynstre remembred yit in dede.

Greeks

Greeks once frequented this island ; and the Gauls, according to Strabo, wrote their contracts and covenants in Greek, a language which they affected, because Marfeilles, one of their cities, was a Grecian colony. The Druids also were celebrated for their learning ; Julius Cæsar himself has given a particular account of their constitutions, which shew that they were excellent politicians. Agricola had established civility in Britain, and greatly reformed the government of this island, whilst he commanded the Roman legions here. From which it appears, that notwithstanding Alfred for the most part followed the laws of his Saxon Predecessors, yet he studied the institutions of other countries, particularly those abovementioned, and so far made use of them as he found they suited his new construction of the English government : from hence are a portion of our present laws, termed the common law.



Although,

Although, from the ravages of time, it is much to be lamented, that there is no perfect code of these laws now extant, yet there is the greatest reason to believe that Alfred formed one: those that yet remain are comprehended under two heads, as before observed, and are intitled by Dr. Watkins, who has collected all the laws from Ethelbert, the first Christian Lawgiver in England, down to the Magna Charta of Henry the Third, *The Laws of Alfred, and the League between Alfred and Guthrum*: but if we may credit the Mirror of Justice, written by Andrew Horne, who lived at that time, not only the laws of King Alfred, but the history of his judgments also were in being, in the reign of Edward the First after the conquest. His laws were likewise made use of at Westminster, in the reign of Edward the Fourth, as appears from a part of the verses of John Harding before recited. Of the few that now remain the following are the principal, and though they appear plain and simple when compared with those

those of the later times, yet are they as elaborate as any of the institutes of that age, and perhaps by being less intricate were more effectual. In them may be observed a greater regard paid to the life of man than in those formed since, as the punishment of almost every crime might have been averted by fines: the persons of every one, from the King to the bondsman, and every limb or member of these, being according to the rule of justice in those days, valued at a certain estimation. Whoever killed a man, or did him violence, was obliged to make recompence according to the valuation of the person slain or injured. In the former case, where death ensued, the recompence was called Weregild, which, if the slayer paid, the King had the first part, which was termed Frith-bote, for the breach of his peace and the loss of his subject; the Lord had another share for the loss of his man, which was called Man-bote; and the kindred of the slain received the remainder, which was denominated Mag-bote, for the

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diminution

diminution of their family. If this fine was not paid, the life of the delinquent was exposed to the kindred of the slain, as to the avengers of blood, according to the Mo-
saical law: and if the forfeiture for an inferior offence was not paid, the final punishment generally was limb for limb, or tooth for tooth, agreeable to the law of Retaliation. Though this regulation has long since been abolished, as too partial to the possessors of property, and blood for blood is now required, as more effectual for the preservation of the lives of the inferior ranks of mankind, yet we see, by the innocence which diffused itself throughout the land soon after its establishment, that, co-operating with Alfred's other institutions, it was found sufficient to extirpate all violence and tyranny, and was properly adapted to the temper of the times.

Another law forbids the buying a man, a horse, or an ox, without a voucher to warrant the right of property. When the Danes
first

first settled in England, it was a common practice between the two nations not only to steal horses and oxen, but also men and women, and to sell them one to another; by which means owners not only lost their cattle, but men were wrongfully made slaves; and it was often impossible to trace the sellers. To remedy these disorders this law, which required vouchers, was made; and it has since appeared so judicious, that, in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, this express statute of Alfred's, as far as it relates to horses and oxen, was revived.

But the most beneficial law that was ever instituted, and to the honour of which this great and good King is undoubtedly intitled, is the mode of trial by juries. Sensible that the spirit of oppression naturally grew with authority, he sought out means to prevent its pernicious effects: to this end he ordered, that in all criminal actions, twelve men, chosen for that purpose from among the delinquent's peers or equals, should determine

the validity of the accusation, and that the Judge should give sentence according to their verdict: as an addition to this invaluable privilege he directed, that sureties for a person's good behaviour, or bail in all criminal cases, exclusive of murder and felony, should be accepted, in order to exempt his subjects from unmerited confinement.

How ought Englishmen to venerate the name of Alfred, the institutor of such noble prerogatives, which raises their nation to an envied pre-eminence above every other, and which, as the great bulwark of their constitution, will ever secure them from the oppression of tyrants. But as laws, however good in themselves, will be ineffectual to answer the salutary purposes for which they are enacted, unless they are properly enforced, Alfred caused his to be observed with the greatest rigour; and he is said to have ordered four and forty Judges to be executed within the compass of one year, for not doing justice. He used to re-examine the

the causes tried in his absence, and if he found any injustice done through favour or interest, he punished the awarder of it severely.

The following regulations which he made for the security of his subjects lives and property, are so plain and simple, and yet so rational and efficacious, that we are apt to wonder they were ever abolished, or being abolished, that they never were revived; how worthy are they of the attention of future Sovereigns? and how far from impracticable, even in the most luxurious and dissipated age, to a Prince who inherited a small share of the judgment, resolution, and patriotism of Alfred?

The wars had caused such disorders and licentiousness throughout the kingdom, that vagrants every where abounded, by whom murders and ravages were committed with impunity, their mean condition screening them from punishment: as they had no set-

tled abode, when they had perpetrated any crime, they shifted their quarters, and went where it was difficult to find them. The King beholding with indignation the honest and industrious part of his subjects thus exposed to the insults of the dissolute, he was extremely anxious to put a stop to so great an evil; he therefore consulted his Council, without whose approbation he never undertook any affair of consequence, and by their advice formed the following plan to prevent any person from living in his dominions without being ready to give an account of his actions.

He caused a survey * to be made of his whole kingdom, and divided it into shires or counties,

* This great work gave rise to the famous survey of the kingdom, made by order of William the Conqueror, now called Domesday-Book. When Alfred had taken the survey necessary for the division of his dominions into shires and hundreds, he caused it to be engrossed and kept at Winchester, where his court was held; from thence it had the name of the Roll, or Book of Winchester; and

counties, the counties into hundreds or wapentakes, and these he subdivided into decennaries or tythings. This being done,

and being extant at the time of the Conqueror's landing, it inspired him with a resolution to have the survey revived, that he might be able to gain a more perfect knowledge of his newly-acquired kingdom: this register was likewise then called The Winchester Book, as being only Alfred's account enlarged and improved; but afterwards this title was altered, and the name of Doomsday-Book given it, either from a supposition that it was so authentic and explicit as to want no amendment till Doomsday, or, which is more probable, from a corruption of Dome-Book, the name given by the Saxons to all the books which contained their laws and institutions. It was the opinion of the author of the Black Book of the Exchequer, Gervasius Tilburienfis, who lived in the reign of Henry the Second, and several other good antiquaries, that it was called the Doomsday-Book, because it was no more lawful to depart or appeal from what it contained, than from the day of doom or last judgment. Others suppose it to be called so, *quasi Liber Domus Dei*, as if it had been originally deposited in the house of God: but Dr. Kennett calls these last trifling derivations, telling us, that the addition of day does not augment the sense of the word, but only doubles and confirms it, and that therefore Doomsday-Book is no more than the book of judicial verdicts, or dooming of judgment; which agrees with the second supposition before-mentioned.

all the inhabitants of the kingdom were obliged to belong to some tything; whoever did not, were looked upon as vagabonds, and as such were denied the protection of the laws. If any person was suspected of a breach of the regulations laid down, and the Headboroughs or chief pledges of the freebourg (for so were the decennaries also termed, because they were freemen mutually engaged as sureties for each other) would not answer for his appearance, or vouch for his innocence, the suspected person was imprisoned, and obliged to undergo a trial: if he fled, and could not be found to clear himself of the charge, or to receive the punishment due to his crime, both the hundred and tything to which he belonged incurred a considerable forfeiture to the King. The delinquent thus flying, the freebourg were allowed thirty-one days to find and bring him to his trial; but if they failed in this, the Headborough, and two more of his decennary, procured twelve chief pledges from the adjacent tythings, to swear, That
they

they believed in their consciences the free-
 bourg was innocent both from the privity of
 the crime, and from the flight of the offender.
 If the Headborough was not of so unim-
 peached a character as to be able to prevail
 on his neighbours to vouch for his veracity,
 he was compelled to make satisfaction to the
 King by a fine, on non-payment of which
 his goods were seized ; and if they were not
 sufficient to discharge the forfeiture, a ge-
 neral levy was made on the whole freebourg
 for that purpose ; and this, in extraordinary
 cases, was extended to the counties.

A learned modern Author * says, “ This
 “ remarkable part of the Saxon œconomy
 “ has been a thousand times described by
 “ our Historians, Antiquarians, and Law-
 “ yers, and yet never explained by any of
 “ them ; they have all pursued the same
 “ high road of notices, and all followed in
 “ one beaten tract of observations ; and they

* Mr. Whitaker, in his History of Manchester, vol. ii.
 fol. 114, 115.

“ have

“ have praised it without assigning reasons,
 “ and admired it greatly without under-
 “ standing it. They have particularly ima-
 “ gined the freebourg and his sponfors to be
 “ merely the masters of common families :
 “ but this surely is so ridiculous a suppo-
 “ sition, as instantly strikes the mind with
 “ a convincing sense of its absurdity. No
 “ polity could seriously think of descending
 “ to such a minuteness, as to bring every
 “ ordinary housekeeper under an immediate
 “ recognizance to the Crown : a military
 “ one especially, such as that of all nations
 “ is in the first stages of civility, and the
 “ Saxon must particularly have been in the
 “ very infancy of their settlement here,
 “ would undoubtedly disdain to do it. The
 “ master of a family, that stipulated to the
 “ state for his peaceable demeanour in it,
 “ was one of those who were dignified
 “ enough to become immediately responsible
 “ to the government, and the head, the
 “ president, and the representative of a
 “ number of others ; and he was in reality
 “ the

“ the proprietor of a lordship, or the chief-
 “ tain of a township : all the inhabitants of
 “ it were his servants, engaged in the mi-
 “ nisteries of his house, or employed in the
 “ care of his cattle and lands ; and they
 “ were properly considered, therefore, as
 “ one family, under the presidency of their
 “ Lord or Chief.”

If it happened that a traveller, whether a friend or stranger, which lodged in any house, became suspected of an offence, and he could not be found when sought for, enquiry was made how long he had staid in the house ; if it appeared that he had not continued in it above two nights, the householder might, by his own oath and those of two of his neighbours, exculpate himself from a suspicion of privity ; on which he was discharged : but if the guest had lodged three nights in the house, the householder must pursue the same step for his acquittal that he would have done, had the delinquent been one of his own family ; from

hence the Saxon proverb, *twan nighr gese
 twan nighr hine*; “Two nights a guest, and
 the third one of the family.” Thus every
 householder being responsible for his family,
 the whole tything for the householders, the
 the hundred for the tythings, and the county
 for the hundreds, every one was watchful
 over his neighbour’s actions, and the slightest
 offence against the laws of society could not
 be committed with impunity.

When the King had thus distributed his
 subjects into distinct shires, hundreds, and
 tythings, and thereby obtained a ready means
 of discovering delinquents of every kind, he
 abolished the office of Vidome, substituting
 in its place that of Sheriff, or Reeve of the
 Shire *, who, from that institution, has
 ever

* Shire is derived from the Saxon word Scyran, to
 branch or divide. It is the opinion of some Historians,
 that Alfred was not the first who formed these divisions,
 termed Shires; and they support their opinion by prov-
 ing, from the authority of Asser and some other antient
 Writers, that several parts of the island were distinguished
 by

ever since continued, then as a deputy to the Earl, and now as an immediate officer of the Crown. Before this regulation of Alfred's, the Earls were not properly Governors of any particular jurisdiction, but rather martial Leaders or Commanders, from whence they were styled according to the people they led to the wars; as *Comes Merciorum*, Earl of the Mercians, &c. but using this authority they had acquired by the sword without controul, whilst they themselves followed the concerns of war, they appointed deputies to administer the government of the countries in which their estates lay, rather as rights of Lordship, than offices

by that name long before his reign, as Berrockshire (Berkshire), Wiltunshire (Wiltshire), and others; yet, as all the shires that are mentioned by these early Authors lie to the south of the Thames, and constituted the kingdom of Wessex, it does not disprove that this King extended them to the northern parts of his dominions, after he had gained possession of the other kingdoms which formed the heptarchy; nor, though he still preserved their antient names, that he prescribed new bounds to them more convenient for their distribution into hundreds and tythings.

of

of charge or duty. These deputies, from their lordly carriage, were termed Vice-Domines, or abbreviated, Vidomes, who carried their tyranny to such a height, that Alfred thought proper to put a stop to it. From that time he appointed the Earl to be Governor of the county from whence he was denominated, placing under him a Shire-Reeve or Vice-Comes, whose authority he circumscribed within certain limits, and made dependent on himself: this first gave rise to the conjugate relation of the three terms, *comes*, *vice-comes*, and *comitatus*.

Besides the Sheriff, for the better administration of the laws, he ordained in every shire peculiar justices, who were the supreme judges in the *Scipe gemot*, or county-court, and held cognizance of those matters not determinable in the courts of each hundred, breaking thereby the prefecture of the Vidome into two distinct offices, that of a Judge, and of a Sheriff, the former being a mere judicial employment, the latter

ter of a mixed nature. The King having thus reduced the quality of the officer to a condition more consonant to a due administration of justice, he settled also the methods of suits, and the most ready prosecution of right, ordaining, that for the greater ease of his subjects original writs should be granted by the proper officer as a matter of duty, not of favour, without especial petition to the King.

The rights and practices of the hundred-courts, county-courts, and of those other inferior courts of justice in every town, then established, and which are now termed Lects, we have lost the true knowledge of. View of Frank-pledge (the original term) is a liberty properly belonging only to the Crown: no subject can, either by prescript or by patent, have greater interest in them, or assume a greater power over them, than as dependent on the King; by whose permission he appoints his steward to take presentment of all matters within the jurisdiction

tion of the court, and to appropriate the fines and amerciaments that fall within the same to his own use.

The institution of Frank-pledges, as described in Edward the Confessor's laws, was antiently accounted the great security and establishment of the kingdom, and was the only mode of administering justice in inferior criminal matters, such as force, trespass, and misbehaviour, at that time in use; the proper judge thereof was the Sheriff, or Justice of the hundred-court: but when the Lords of manors, for the ease of their tenants, and for the better countenance and aggrandizement of their manor-courts, purchased the liberty of the hundred-courts within their manors, whilst they advanced by this method the repute of their own court, they impaired the authority of the other; till at length, when manors, through alienations, forfeitures, partitions, and special customs, became every where dismembered or extinguished, the service of the hundred-

hundred-courts being of course neglected and unattended, the greatest part of their jurisdiction by degrees was transferred to courts of a superior nature, since erected, and to the determination of the King's Justices at the assizes, or at the sessions; so that the leets are now become little more than a shadow of their first institution.

Had they continued in practice according to their antient usage, they would not, even at this day, have been unprofitable to the commonwealth. The contentions which daily arise between towns and parishes, relative to the settlement of persons chargeable, the licentious and ungovernable behaviour of servants and workmen, which gives so much trouble to the Justices, and that surcharge of vagrants and disorderly persons which every where abounds, with many other similar inconveniences, might have been avoided or remedied by the observance of this institution: for when even the most inconsiderable person could not leave the free-

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bourg

bourg to which he belonged without permission from the borsholder, nor be received into another without a strict examination, as the tything was answerable for any consequent damages that might arise from the removal, the liberty and readiness with which the lower ranks unnecessarily change their places of abode must be prevented, and the real settlement of every person remain undisputed. Besides, the continual suspicion such persons lay under, and the ready prosecution at home of the least offences against good manners towards the neighbourhood, which was strictly attended to in these courts, checked every secret inclination to licentiousness before it was carried into execution. Many things however have contributed to the decay of this wise ordinance. It must be acknowledged, that the increase of the commonwealth, and the accumulation of riches arising from the extension of commerce, would render the observance of this regulation, in its primitive strictness, grievous and difficult; yet a re-

vival of it in some degree would not only tend to prevent many irregularities, but to preserve that equilibrium throughout the kingdom which is every day decreasing, and which, in time, must endanger the well-being of the state.

When the King had invented these remedies for the diseases under which his kingdom laboured, he had a greater difficulty to encounter, which was, the proper administration of them; for though he had fashioned these laws with the greatest judgment, and planned a course which must constrain obedience, yet he wanted able persons to be the ministers of his justice; to hear with impartiality, and to apply them with propriety. As, from the ignorance of the age, a scarcity of men any way qualified for such an undertaking must be very evident, this was a task that only the indefatigable Alfred could accomplish; the difficulty appeared the greater on account of the variety of persons necessary to be employed;

this course of justice being instituted in such a form, that it must be administered in the counties, hundreds, and freebourgs, by the Earls, Eoldermen, and Borsholders residing in the different divisions throughout the kingdom : and though a scanty allowance of erudition was sufficient to qualify a Borsholder, yet none could be found at first among either the Earls, Sheriffs, Justices, or even that lower order, answerable to the King's purposes.

The knowledge of such laws as the Saxons had hitherto been governed by, had usually been esteemed the proper study of the Earls and Nobles, they being in the several counties the supreme judges ; but the course of it was so changed by a long and barbarous war, that they no longer attended to the preservation of the laws, but fought, by might only, to defend themselves and their property from violence. Thus the Nobility being from their infancy illiterate and overbraeing, whilst the people on their part
were

were rude and ungovernable, the latter would seldom rest satisfied with any sentence till it had been reheard and confirmed by the King. How unreasonable a burden this was, is very apparent; but Alfred, forgetful of the inconveniences that attended his unwearied application, actuated by an unexampled zeal for the good of his people, with incredible pains and patience at length carried his plan into execution: he daily heard the judgments which were complained of recapitulated, and when he had given satisfaction to the injured parties, he guarded against a repetition of the injustice, by removing or punishing the Judge. In consequence of this strict attention the Earls, Justices, and Officers of every degree applied themselves to the study of the laws, and were soon properly qualified to administer them with propriety.

These wise institutions had such a wonderful effect, and produced so sudden and extraordinary a change throughout the king-

dom, that instead of the murder and rapine which had so long prevailed, there was neither robbery, breach of peace, public offence, or private injury to be heard of. When the King, to make a trial of the honesty of his people, caused gold bracelets to be hung up in the highways, no one ventured to take them down; virgins might then safely travel alone, nor fear the insults of any rude libertine; and if a purse of money was dropped on the road, it was suffered to lie there for months together without being taken up by any but the real proprietor. How happy the country, blessed with such a King! for to Alfred alone were his people indebted for this return of the golden age; to his prudent regulations, and uncommon vigilance in the execution of them, was it owing, that from a state of indigence and confusion, wherein it was as difficult to acquire wealth as to preserve it, England became a prosperous and powerful kingdom.

Alfred

Alfred not only thus regulated the internal police of his kingdom, but he employed great attention to secure to his people their present happiness, and to guard them against any further invasions from foreign enemies : to this purpose he formed his subjects into different bodies, and keeping them properly disciplined, they were at all times, and in every shire, in readiness to march under the command of the Earl of the county to repel the earliest attempts of any invader. Upon the first notice of an enemy's landing, the Earls had orders to join their forces at certain places, under the command of a Generalissimo, appointed by the King as guardian of particular divisions of the kingdom : these were persons of great repute, trust, and power, who, being constantly resident on those partitions committed to their charge, had an extraordinary commission for the common safety of the island. We find Earl Ceolmund constituted guardian of Kent, Swithulf a Bishop, of Essex, Eadulf an Earl, of Suffex, with many others ;

and Ethelred, Earl of Mercia, the King's Son-in-law, is styled by him in his will, *Princeps Militiæ*, as at that time he commanded in chief under Alfred.

Nothing can convince us so much of the great improvement this King made in his military concerns, than the success it was attended with, and the estimation he was now held in by his enemies. In the beginning of his reign the land was almost depopulated, and the Saxon name extinguished, the Danes possessing the greatest part of the island, and making perpetual incursions into the small portion that remained unsubdued; notwithstanding which, by his own example, added to the exactness of his discipline and the bravery of his few forces, he overcame difficulties and obstructions that would have required the experience of a Cæsar, and the approved valour of Cæsar's veterans; at length, so great was the terror his name inspired even among those Danes who had been his conquerors, that though they
had

had been many years in France, and had of course greatly improved themselves in the art of war, yet on their return to this kingdom, even after they had safely landed, and had strongly intrenched themselves, they were repulsed and driven away without putting the state to a greater levy of men than the ordinary forces of the counties near which they landed.

There is no doubt but that so discerning a Prince failed not to proportion his rewards to the merit of his military Commanders ; and it is probable that, in imitation of Arthur the British King, whose example was recent, he conferred the honour of Knighthood upon some of them. Malmſbury gives a particular account of the solemn manner in which he knighted his grandson Athelſtan, the eldeſt Son of Edward his ſucceſſor, whilſt he was yet but a youth, giving him at the ſame time a ſcarlet coat, a belt ſet with precious ſtones, and a Saxon ſword in a gold ſcabbard. The King was ſo pleaſed

3 with

with the lively spirit, engaging behaviour, and lovely countenance of this young Prince, that with a prophetic spirit, after the ceremony, he gave him his blessing, and saluted him as a future King : nor did Athelstan frustrate his Grandfather's wishes, or disappoint the great expectations that penetrating Monarch had formed of him ; for, succeeding his father Edward on the throne of England, he endeavoured to copy the virtues and excellencies of his Grandfather (whom he is also said to have resembled in countenance) and exceeded both his immediate Predecessors in the external glory of his kingdom.

Alfred did not confine his improvements entirely to his military affairs on land, he paid an equal attention to his navy, and laid the foundation of that superiority at sea, which England has hitherto been able to maintain over all the other maritime powers ; he studied the art of building ships, and from considering the construction of the
 Danish

Danish vessels, invented others which had an advantage over them. The ships used antiently by the Saxons in the Baltic Sea were very rude and plain; they were built high before and behind, and formed so as to go with either end forward, without fixed seats for the rowers, who removed to and fro to any part of the vessel as occasion required: but those planned by Alfred were in the form of gallies, and usually carried sixty oars; they greatly exceeded those of the Danes in size and swiftness, and being built considerably higher than theirs, his men had a great advantage in an engagement over their enemies with respect to casting their lances: their make enabled them easily to run under shore or into creeks, and if their adversaries had the wind, they could bear away with such rapidity that it was impossible to overtake them. Not satisfied with having given directions to his shipwrights for the construction of these vessels, he went on board them when finished,

finished, and carefully examined whether they were built according to his model.

His care and attention did not end here; for he was not content with having furnished himself with a fleet for the defence of his kingdom, he caused similar alterations to be made in his trading ships, that his subjects in general may reap the benefit of his improvements. The encouragement he gave to navigation, with the unwearied pains he took to discover remote countries, and point out the advantages which would arise from them, excite our admiration, and convinces us that the mind and genius of this heroic Prince were, in all their dimensions, truly royal and august.

In the Cottonian library is an old memorial of a voyage performed by one Oëther, a Dane, which was afterwards repeated by order of Alfred for the discovery of a north-east passage to the Indies. As the King was industrious in searching out and giving encouragement

couragement to men that were well versed in naval affairs, Oðther came to offer his services, and was employed by him in making discoveries towards the Artic Circle. During his voyage (of which the following is an account, containing in all probability, as it is written throughout in the third person singular, the very words delivered to the King, and taken by an amanuensis) he surveyed the coasts of Norway and Lapland, and brought with him not only a description of those countries, but some horse-whale's teeth, esteemed more valuable than ivory. The relation, which I shall present to my Readers on account of its originality, is written in the Saxon language: the following particulars translated from it will suffice to satisfy our curiosity:

“ Oðther saith, that the country wherein he dwelt was called Helgoland. Oðther told his Lord King Alfred that he dwelt farthest north of any other Norman. He said, he dwelt towards the north part of the
land,

land, toward the west coast, and affirmeth that the land (notwithstanding it stretcheth marvelous far toward the north) yet it is all desert, and not inhabited unless it be very few places here and there, where certain Fins dwell upon the coast, who live by hunting all the winter, and by fishing all the summer. He saith, that upon a certain time he fell into a fancy and desire to know how far the land stretched northward; whereupon he took his voyage directly northward along the coast; having always the desert land upon his starboard, and upon the larboard the main ocean, and continued his course for the space of three days, in which space he was come as far toward the north as commonly the Whale-hunter used to travel; whence he proceeded toward the north as far as he was able to sail in other three days, at the end whereof he perceived that the coast turned toward the east, or else the sea opened with a main gulf into the land he knew not how far. Well he wist and remembered that he was fain to stay till he had

had a western wind, and somewhat northerly; and thence he sailed plain east along the coast still, so far as he was able in four days, at the end of which time he was compelled again to stay till he had a full northerly wind; forasmuch as the coast bowed thence directly toward the south, at leastwise the sea opened into the land he could not tell how far: so that he sailed thence along the coast continually full south so far as he could travel in five days, and at the five days end he discovered a mighty river which opened very far into the land; at the entry of which river he staid his course, and in conclusion turned back again: for he durst not enter therein for fear of the inhabitants of the land; perceiving that on the other side of the river the country was thoroughly inhabited, which was the first peopled land which he had found since his departure from his own dwelling, whereas continually through his voyage he had evermore a desert wilderness upon his starboard side, except in some places he saw a few
fishers,

fishers, fowlers, and hunters, which were all Fins.

“ The Biarmes told him a number of stories both of their own country and the countries adjoining ; howbeit he knew not nor could affirm any thing for certain truth, forasmuch as he was not on the land himself. This only he judged, that the Fins and Biarmes spake but one language. The principal purpose of his travel this way was to increase the knowledge and discovery of these coasts and countries, for the more commodity of fishing for horse-whales, which have in their teeth, bones of great price and excellence, whereof he brought some on his return unto the King. Their skins are also very good to make cables for ships, and so used.

“ This kind of whale is much less in quantity than other kinds, having not in length above seven ells ; and as for the common kind of whales, the place of most
and

and best hunting of them is in his own country, whereas some be forty-eight ells in length, and some fifty, of which sort he affirmed, that he himself was one of the fix, which in the space of three days killed threescore.

“ He was a man of exceeding wealth in such riches wherein the wealth of the country doth consist. At the time that he came to the King he had of his own breed six hundred tame deer, of that kind which they called rain-deer. He was among the chief men of his country one; and yet he had but twenty kine and twenty swine, and that little which he tilled, he tilled it all with horses. Their principal wealth consisted in the tribute which the Fins pay them, which is all in skins of wild beasts, feathers of birds, whalebones, and cables and tackling for ships made of whales or seal skins.”

King Alfred, in his own translation of Orosius into the Saxon language, gives an

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exact

exact description of this or a subsequent voyage, which varies but in a few instances from the above : he also adds to it an account of another voyage to the same regions, undertaken by Wulstan, an Englishman, which he prosecuted agreeable to the directions received from the King, and which were founded on the observations of Oöther.

It appears rather improbable, that his mariners should be able to make a voyage to the East-Indies before the invention of the compass, but there are several accounts which seem to confirm the truth of it. Alfred resolving, from the purest principles of charity, to send relief to the Christians of St. Thomas, in the Indies, employed one Sigelin a Priest to deliver his gifts : the Ecclesiastic executed his commission with great punctuality, and returned with an immense treasure of the produce of India, consisting of precious stones, perfumes, and other curiosities, of which Alfred made presents to several foreign Princes. Sigelin, in return for his fidelity,

fidelity, was made Bishop of Sherborne, and left several of these Indian curiosities to his church, as unquestionable vouchers of his voyage.

With some of these diamonds, it is supposed, Alfred caused a more august and imperial crown to be made than had ever been used in England before. In the arched room in the cloisters of Westminster-abbey, where the antient regalia of the kingdom are kept, upon a box, the cabinet of the most antient crown, there is this inscription, "*Hæc est principalior corona cum qua coronabantur Ælfredus, Edvardus, &c.*" "This is the principal crown with which Alfred, Edward, &c. were crowned."

This crown is of very antient work, with flowers adorned with stones, but the setting somewhat plain. As it appears by the inscription to be the crown of Alfred and his Successors, it probably was made by his order, and used by him when he became universal-King of the heptarchy. Notwith-

standing the head of that King on his coins is only encircled with a simple diadem, after the most common and antient fashion, and although we do not find in any Anglo-Saxon coins one instance of an imperial crown, till the time of Edward the Confessor, which are brought as objections to the credibility of this voyage, yet this does not disprove that crowns were worn both by Alfred and his immediate Successors at their coronation; and, if it wanted any further proof to authenticate it, we may appeal to the jewel dug up in the Isle of Athelney, the King's retreat, now preserved in the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford, which has an inscription on it in Saxon, importing, that it was set by the direction of Alfred.

After this great Prince had restored peace and regularity to his people, provided for their future defence, and endeavoured to introduce riches and plenty among them, by the encouragement he gave to trade and commerce, he turned his thoughts to the cultivation

cultivation of the arts, and the restoration of letters. The barbarous Danes had almost obliterated all the traces of them ; amidst their devastations, they had ever shewn a particular malignity to learning and religion ; they exerted this savage and wanton cruelty not only against the professors of it, whom they destroyed with an unrelenting hand, but against the profession itself, committing to the flames every book they could find, or whatever tended to promote it. By this means ignorance had made such considerable strides throughout his dominions, that when he began his intended restoration of literature, there was not a man to be found in the kingdom of Wessex capable of translating a Latin epistle, or that understood the English of the Latin service. Nor was this the case in England alone, scholars and men of learning were equally scarce in all the nations on this side the Alps, from the irruptions of these Barbarians. But wheresoever the King found men qualified for his purposes, he invited them over, and,

by his great liberality and condescension, secured them to himself; and such was his generosity and courtesy towards these strangers, that notwithstanding their scarcity, he soon furnished himself with many able assistants in his arduous undertaking, the names of some of whom are handed down to us,

Johannes Erigena, an Irishman, as his name (Eri or Erin being the old name for Ireland) expresses; but he is better known by the name of Scotus, which at that time was a common appellation both for the Scots and Irish, who were originally the same people. This man was endowed with a lively wit, and had acquired an uncommon fund of learning for the age he lived in: he was skilled in all the Oriental languages, particularly the Greek, Chaldean, and the Arabic, for the attainment of which he spent many years at Athens, and other parts of the East. From thence, returning through Italy in his way to France, he was honoured by the notice of the Emperor Carolus

rolus Calvus, and received great civilities from that Prince. One day as they sat at table together, the Emperor said to him in a jocular strain, "*Quid interest inter Scottum & Sottum?*" "What difference is there between a Scot and a Sot?" to which Scotus is said to have returned this witty answer, "*Mensa tantum.*" "There is but a table between them." The repartee, though so pointed, offended not the Emperor, but raised the reputation of Scotus among the wits of Italy. His great abilities reaching the ears of Alfred, he spared no cost to allure him to England, and was successful in his attempt. On his arrival, after the King had received great benefit from his instructions himself, both in the knowledge of foreign languages, and the arts and customs of the people among whom he had travelled, he directed him to teach publicly in the monastery of Malmfbury; which he continued to do for several years, till having by some means or other offended his scholars,

they put an end to his life by stabbing him with their penknives.

Another person of eminence in his profession he procured from France, whose name was Grimbald, a man of singular piety and worth, who to the knowledge of most branches of literature added a skill in music; an accomplishment particularly pleasing to Alfred, who was not one of those *that have no music in their souls*; his mind, attuned to harmony and virtue, produced that sweet concord of godlike actions, which cheered the hearts of all his subjects, and still charms mankind. When the King in his childhood was sent by his Father to Rome, Grimbald saw him at Rheims, and treated him with great tenderness and civility; in return for which, as well as to forward his plan, Alfred prevailed on him to take up his abode in England, and gave him many proofs of his gratitude and munificence. After having been professor of divinity at Oxford, he was appointed Abbot
of

of a monastery built and endowed by the King at Winchester, where he died. In Harpsfield's history there are extant the heads of a speech made by Grimbald in a synod held at London before King Alfred and his Nobles, wherein he discoursed with great wisdom of the primitive dignity of Human Nature, and of its corruption by the Fall,

Many other learned persons the King collected likewise from the different parts of Europe; and so affable and generous was his behaviour to these foreigners, that his court at length became the resort of such as were eminent in their several professions, or were capable of giving him information in any particular branch of knowledge with which he longed to enrich his mind. He met with a considerable acquisition of this kind in two Monks, who, being entirely devoted to a monastic life, had fled during the ravages of the Danes to the monastery of St. David, situated in the furthest corner
of

of Wales, where they lived in obscurity. With difficulty were they discovered by the assiduous King, and with greater difficulty prevailed on to exchange their tranquil retirement for the pleasures of a court. The one was Affer, surnamed from the place of his retreat Menevenfis, who though he had a prospect, by acquiring the King's favour, of being able to benefit the monastery to which he was so devoted, yet he could not by any promises be induced to dedicate more than half his time to the service of his Prince. Alfred took great delight in his conversation, and as proofs of his regard made him Archbishop of St. David's, besides bestowing on him the churches of Amerbury, Banwell, and Exeter. In the King's life-time Affer wrote a summary of his glorious actions, which are now extant, and dedicated them to him, but lived not to continue them to the end of his reign.

The other Monk which Alfred had from St. David's, was greatly esteemed by him
for

for his learning, especially for his skill in logic, music, and arithmetic: he is not known by any other denomination than John the Monk, and probably is the same whom the King, in his Preface to his Translation of Gregory's Pastoral, calls John his Mass-Priest, who taught him to understand, and enabled him to translate that work.

Several other natives, also famed for their learning and abilities, enjoyed the invigorating beams of this Prince's patronage, but none of them more than Adulphius Neotus, better known at this time by the name of St. Neot. This pious Ecclesiastic is said to have been the reputed Son of King Athelwulph, but Affer calls him the Kinsman, not the Brother, of Alfred. He took great pains in the early part of this Prince's life to instill into his mind the principles of virtue and religion; and to him was Alfred in a great measure indebted for that prudence, constancy, and piety which raised him so much above the Princes

of that age. Neotus was not only celebrated for the regularity of his life, but for his zeal and industry in propagating the Christian religion, which after his death procured him canonization. He was so greatly honoured, that being buried in St. Guerrir's church, at Ginesbury in Cornwall, he extinguished the name of that old Cornish Saint by his own superior splendor, and from thenceforth the place was called after him, Neotstow. This not being esteemed an honour equal to his great merit, the palace of Earl Alric, in Huntingdonshire, was some time after converted into a monastery, and dedicated to him; and his body being translated thither, gave the name of St. Neot's to the town, which it retains to this day. Even this was not satisfactory to the enthusiastic admirers of that Saint; for in the year 1213, the fifteenth of the reign of King John, the Abbot of Croyland, thinking his abbey a fitter shrine for so much sanctity, moved his bones from St. Neot's and laid them in Croyland-minster.

Thus

Thus nurtured by a King whose judgment, penetration, and zeal was unequalled, and, by the labours of his able Coadjutors, religion and learning began to spread their influence throughout the land, to correct the hearts and to purify the manners of the English. That regularity and honesty which had hitherto proceeded from the fear of punishment, now flowed from a nobler motive; from conviction of the propriety of such a conduct, the advantages which arose from it not only to themselves but to their fellow-subjects, and the satisfaction it gave to their beloved King. The ecclesiastical duties which had been neglected or perverted through the ignorance of the Clergy, were soon restored to their primitive order; and though when Alfred first began his reformation, there was neither Priest or Bishop that understood the services they repeated, as they knew nothing of the Latin language, and there were then no translations of it, yet the King so exerted himself, that e'er long the bishoprics were filled up with

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learned men, and the inferior Clegy qualified for their different functions.

As Alfred completed the reformation of the church by the assistance of these holy and learned men, so in all his regulations of the government he consulted those that were eminent for their abilities, to whose opinion he paid great deference: but not content with this transitory advice, he by degrees instituted two Councils, to whose deliberations he submitted every affair of importance relative to the state. Though his own active soul was the great Cenforium which enlivened and animated these different parts of the constitution, nevertheless with a laudable diffidence he waited for their approbation before he carried into execution any of the plans his benevolent heart suggested, wishing by his forbearance to set an example of moderation to those of his Successors, who may not be blessed with his discernment and rectitude. By this means he laid the foundation of that excellent form of government, which,

which, after various amendments to suit it to the difference of the times, is now esteemed (the balance being duly preserved) the most perfect and unexceptionable mode that any nation enjoys.

The first of these assemblies might be termed (though it was not then called so) his Privy Council, and consisted of Bishops, Abbots, and Clergy, particularly of those learned men before-mentioned, with such of his Nobles as were remarkable for the greatest wisdom and integrity: with these he assumed a friendship and familiarity, and consulted them according to their different abilities; nor was this esteemed at that time an office or employment, but standing high in his favour, and always near him, these were the men above all others whom he chose for his companions and confidants.

The second consisted likewise of Bishops, Earls, Judges, and some of the principal Thanes, and was termed in the Saxon language,

guage, Wittena-Gemot, that is, An assembly of Wise Men; or rather, Mychel-Synod, which signifies, in the same language, the Great or General Assembly; both these names are rendered into Latin by the word *Concilium*. It is not an easy matter to determine who were the wise men that originally composed this assembly. On the first settlement of the Saxons they might only consist of their chief Officers, among whom the conquered lands were divided; but in process of time, when the number of that people was greatly increased, the Kings gave to those of their followers who were distinguished by their birth, services, or personal merit, portions of land, on condition that they served the Crown on certain occasions: this land these Chiefs parcelled out again to others, with a reservation of particular services to themselves. These two sorts of possessors were called Thanes, that is, Servants; the first were distinguished by the name of King's Thanes, which answers to that of the immediate vassals to the Crown:

Crown: after the Norman conquest they were denominated Barons, and in time Peers of the realm; for Earls and Dukes were honorary titles, or names annexed to offices. That these composed a part of the Grand Council of the kingdom is not doubted; whether the other Thanes were admitted to it is uncertain.

Each kingdom of the heptarchy had its Wittena-Gemot, but Alfred now constituted a general one for the benefit of his united dominions, and settled it in a formal regular course: this was considered as the great Council of the nation, the members of which owed their admission to their own quality, or the employments they held. Considering that from the perpetual changes incident to a state, those laws which he had already provided may not answer every purpose, the King enacted, by a perpetual ordinance, that twice in a year, or oftener if need required, they should meet at London, to make such alterations and amendments in

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the system he had established, as contingencies may render necessary. From this institution of Alfred's it became customary for his Saxon Successors to hold a similar assembly thrice a year on the three great festivals ; not always in one place, but in any other, according to the option of the King, which was usually where he kept his court; and that this was sometimes done by Alfred himself, notwithstanding he had appointed London as the place of their meeting, is certain from the verses afterwards inserted, which mention their being assembled at Siffard in Oxfordshire.

It is disputed with great warmth, whether the people were permitted by Alfred to send Representatives to this Assembly : at present it is almost impossible to determine the controversy with any degree of certainty ; but as the whole kingdom was then entirely in the hands of the King and his Thanes, and all that held lands under them were kept in such a state of subjection and

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dependence

dèpendence as to be wholly at their Lord's disposal, it is probable that the act of those who held the absolute interest was binding to the whole kingdom, without even the concurrence of their liege-men and vassals. This privilege appears not to have been claimed, or at least enjoyed by the people at large, till the reign of Henry the Third, when the authority of the Barons began to be somewhat curbed, and the body of people became of more consequence than they had hitherto been.

After having regulated with the greatest judgment all these momentous affairs, Alfred, ever attentive to the most minute concerns of his people, began to extend his plan, and to attend to the ornamental part of government. The imperial sovereignty of this kingdom before his time being on no fixed establishment, but accidentally possessed by the several Princes of the heptarchy, it was in itself feeble and of little importance: royalty had not attained its

proper advancement, nor was the dignity annexed to it sufficiently distinguished from the inferior ranks ; but no sooner did Alfred begin to cultivate the monarchical tree, than, pleased with the soil to which he had transplanted it, the leaves, the blossoms, and the fruit manifested all the properties of true imperial sovereignty, so that time was only wanted to bring it to that height and beauty its nature will admit of.

The King having gloriously put an end to a long and destructive war, united the divided empire, firmly established peace, regulated the religious and civil concerns of his kingdom, polished the manners of his people, and given every encouragement to trade and commerce, he now proceeded to those improvements which necessarily follow, and which, as they tend as much to promote the glory as the advantage of the kingdom, may be termed apparelling the state. Till this time the English scarcely made use of any other materials in building
their

their houses than timber; but Alfred directed his subjects how to build them with stone, in a stronger and more regular manner, and having raised his palaces with stone or brick, the Nobility by degrees began to imitate his example; but this method became not general till some ages after.

His next step was to repair the desolation occasioned by the wars; to this end he not only re-built those towns and cities which had been destroyed by the enemy, but he laid the foundation of new ones: so numerous were his undertakings of this kind, that the Writers of his actions have avoided a recapitulation of them, lest they should be led into prolixity. Time has accidentally brought to light, by an inscription on a stone dug out of the ruins of an old wall, that he was the first founder of the town of Shaftesbury, which Malmſbury describes as being much more extensive and magnificent at the time it was founded, than when he

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wrote. The stone with the inscription was placed in the chapter of the nunnery there, and contained these words: “ *Anno* “ *Dominicæ Incarnationis 880 Ælfredus Rex* “ *fecit hanc Urbem, regni sui 8º.*” “ King “ Alfred founded this city in the year of “ our Lord 880, and in the 8th of his “ reign.”

Of the cities which he repaired, London is expressly mentioned as one ; and it might be added, that these reparations were equal to the building it from the foundation, the Danes having so totally destroyed it. For some years before Alfred's reign no mention is made of its being peopled ; it was only a strong hold for the Danes during their temporary incursions, for which purpose, as it lay open to the sea, and far advanced into the country, it was very convenient. In the same manner he rebuilt Winchester, the antient court and seat of the West-Saxon Kings, which in the reign of his brother Ethelbert had been utterly destroyed by the Danes,

Danes. During the six years that Ethelred sat on the throne he was so harassed by those Infidels, that he was fully employed to defend himself against their fury, and had not time even to repair his capital.

Among the forts and castles that Alfred built were those of Middleton and Barford in Kent, of the Devizes in Wiltshire, and of Alfreton in Derbyshire; but a small part only of the structures reared by him can now be ascertained: Aſſer, who lived at the time, enumerates the difficulties the King underwent to bring so many works to perfection, from the extreme stupidity of the Saxons, who could not be prevailed on, either by his commands or persuasions, to forward the buildings he directed, though they plainly saw the use and benefit of them, till some calamity, brought on by their indolence, too late excited them to it. From this we may discern, that the number of fortresses could not be small, for being designed to prevent the sudden inroads of the

Danes, which extended on every side, we may conclude, as this purpose was at length effected, that they were erected around the sea coast, and on the banks of every great river.

The monasteries he founded and endowed may be reckoned among his works of magnificence, though the first that he erected was rather calculated to shew his devotion than his greatness. In commemoration of the secure retreat he had found in the Isle of Athelney, and to fulfil a vow he then made, as soon as the evacuation of the Danes would permit, he built a monastery on it; but as there was scarcely more than two acres of firm ground in the whole island, he was obliged to take an uncommon method, and use extraordinary materials in its erection: the boggy land not being able to bear a load of stone, the church was entirely built of timber, and supported on four large wooden pillars, with four choirs or chapels surrounding the auditory. The
house

house for the reception of the religious was built of the same slight materials, which excluded all grandeur. He next founded a nunnery at the east gate of his new city of Shaftesbury, which he stored with Nuns, most of whom were the children of Noblemen, and placed his own daughter Ethelgitha over them as Abbess. The last of his works of this kind was the monastery which he founded at Winchester, called The New Monastery: this being situated in his principal city, where he constantly resided and kept his court, and which he designed as a burial place for himself and his Successors, we have room to suppose it was intended to be more magnificent than the other; but as it was begun only a little before his death, he lived not to see it finished.

These were the religious houses he endowed; but if we enumerate all those to which he was a benefactor, we may include all that are situated in the north-west parts of Christendom, for he confined not his

charities to his own dominions. Having allotted one half of his revenues to the service of God, he divided that into four parts for different purposes; one fourth he allowed for the maintenance of the monasteries at Ethelingey and Shaftesbury, and another to the occasional relief of those religious houses in Wesssex and Mercia which stood in need of it, or to such as more particularly required assistance in the other parts of England, Wales, Ireland, and France. His endowment of the bishopric of Durham with the gift of all the country between the Tyne and the Tees, his presents to the cathedral church of Sherbourne, and his munificence to the abbey of Glastonbury, speak the extensive charity and religious zeal of this pious King.

Nor was Alfred's attention confined to the ecclesiastical part of his subjects; the state of ignorance he found even his Nobility in gave him great uneasiness, and excited him to make some provision for their improvement:

provement: to this purpose he erected schools in different parts of the kingdom, and appointed some of the learned men he had procured from abroad to be their instructors; ordaining at the same time, that every freeborn Englishman, whose circumstances would admit of it, should give his children a literary education.

But towards the full accomplishment of this intention, he resolved to found an university for the public profession of arts and sciences, and made choice of Oxford for that purpose. It is difficult to determine what induced Alfred to fix on this spot for the seat of instruction; different reasons are given by different Authors, and it is a disputed point whether he first seated learning there, or only re-established it on an old foundation.

Sir John Spelman says, " That the King
 " made choice of Oxford to be the seat of
 " his university, rather than any other
 " town

“ town within the kingdom of Wesssex, for
 “ a double regard to the occasion of the
 “ state; for whereas that part of the island,
 “ which was on the borders of Mercia, lay
 “ almost waste through its proximity to the
 “ Northumbrian and East-Anglian Danes,
 “ the King, by founding the university
 “ there, provided as well for replenishing
 “ the wasted parts of the land, by drawing
 “ a confluence of people thither, as for the
 “ restoration of letters.”

But his Annotator, Mr. Hearne, censures
 this reason as very partial, and observes,
 “ That if Alfred had not had a respect to an
 “ university built there before, it would
 “ have been a stronger inducement to him
 “ to have contained himself within the king-
 “ dom of Wesssex, where there were several
 “ towns not far distant from Oxford of great
 “ pleasure, and wherein the King seemed
 “ to take particular delight; namely, Wan-
 “ tage, the place of his nativity, Abington,
 “ and Dorchester: either of these places
 “ would

“ would have been as convenient as Oxford,
 “ for inviting a conflux of people to replant
 “ the borders of the kingdom of Mercia: so
 “ that the chief reason why Alfred chose
 “ Oxford, without all doubt was, because
 “ letters had flourished there before, and
 “ that it had obtained a very great name on
 “ this account. And though it must be
 “ confessed that the place at that time was
 “ deserted by its students, on account of the
 “ tyranny of the Danes, yet there were
 “ houses, inns, schools, churches, and all
 “ things else that might be quickly made fit
 “ for them again. That this is not con-
 “ jectural is plain, as well from what Asser
 “ has asserted in his life of Alfred, as from
 “ what is related in the annals of Hyde,
 “ concerning the old Bellositium or Beau-
 “ mont being placed somewhat more north
 “ than the University is at present. Here
 “ the University had continued for a great
 “ number of years, having had its original
 “ from divers Greek Philosophers, who pre-
 “ ferred it for its healthy situation to any
 “ other

“ other place, as we are assured by Walter
 “ Burley, Fellow of Merton College, and
 “ Tutor to that famous King, Edward the
 “ Third. When it was that these Philoso-
 “ phers arrived is uncertain, though it is
 “ probable they were some of those Gre-
 “ cians brought over by Theodorus the
 “ Greek Archbishop of Canterbury, about
 “ the year 678. For we find venerable
 “ Bede, and St. John de Beverlaco, always
 “ reputed of this university, to have been
 “ his scholars.”

Thus far that learned Antiquary Mr.
 Hearne; but as Sir John has given as plau-
 sible reasons in contradiction to this asser-
 tion, which he concludes in this positive
 strain, “ For me I take what is alledged
 “ to be sufficient for an Historian to write,
 “ that Alfred was the first founder of the
 “ University of Oxford; and so without
 “ difficulty I shall style him,” I will not
 enter into the controversy, but proceed
 without determining whether Alfred was
 the

the original founder, or only the restorer of it. The dispute relative to the greater antiquity of the universities of Oxford or Cambridge *, appears to have been decided with justice by both these Gentlemen in favour of the former.

* That schools were founded at Cambridge for the instruction of youth at a very early period is undoubted; but it does not appear with certainty, that they were formed into an university till the year 1119, the tenth of Henry the First, when Jeffred, Abbot of Croyland, sent over to his manor of Cottenham near Cambridge, Gislebert, his fellow Monk and Professor of Divinity, with three other Monks who had followed him into England; these being furnished with philosophical theorems and other antient sciences, repaired daily to Cambridge, and having hired a barn, made open profession of teaching and explaining them. In a short time they drew together a company of scholars; but in the second year of their residence their names grew so great, as well from the country as the town, that neither the largest barn or house they could procure were able to contain them; whereupon the Monks divided themselves into several parts of the town, and, taking the university of Orleans for their pattern, read separately to their scholars different lectures. This appears, by the testimony of a respectable Author, to be the original foundation of the University of Cambridge.

At

At Oxford did Alfred found his University, without confining himself in its establishment exactly to the rules observed in foreign seminaries of learning, but contriving, with great judgment, every method which he thought might be conducive to the end he proposed to attain—the restoration of useful knowledge throughout his dominions. He made not only a perpetual provision for the Tutors, but that no inconveniences might arise from the expence attending this mode of instruction to persons of moderate fortunes, he provided also for the support of the students. The number of scholars to be admitted he fixed at eighty, whom he separated into three different colleges, according to their different studies, laying down at the same time strict regulations for their improvement in courtesy and virtue, as well as in learning. The three colleges he built bear the name of the Greater, Lesser, and Little Hall of the University; and these three halls being since united into one college, still retain, in memory

mory of their first denominations, the name of University College, as if they alone had been once all the University; which seems to confirm the opinion of Sir John Spelman. As the halls were three, and founded, according to the religious impressions of that age, in the name of the Holy Trinity, the distribution of the sciences in them was also three-fold; namely, Grammar, Arts, and Divinity. In the Little Hall, Grammar only was taught; in the Lesser, Logic, Music, Arithmetic, Geometry, and Astronomy; whilst the Great Hall was appropriated to the study of Divinity alone. After the Monk was appointed the first reader of grammar and rhetoric; John the Monk, who came over with Grimbald, of astronomy and geometry; John the Monk of St. David's, of logic, music, and arithmetic; and Neotus and Grimbald were the first divinity professors. These schools being founded, were not endowed by Alfred, according to the usual custom, with lands and possessions, as the tenure of these might be uncertain,

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but he assigned them an annual stipend out of his revenue for their maintenance, which amounted to an eighth part of his income. When this important work was wholly perfected, the schools stored with students and furnished with professors, the King himself, attended by all his Nobles in great solemnity, graced the first lectures with his presence, and reaped the reward of that unwearied attention he had paid to the institution, by an internal satisfaction, and the admiration and blessings of the whole assembly.

As neither the hand or head of this worthy King ever relaxed in the service of his people, or the proper support of his own dignity, but were continually employed either in securing or embellishing the state, he began to enlarge or rebuild the royal palaces, which were now unsuited to the accumulation of his power. Having acquired by study, and the conversation of those who had visited Rome, a taste for architecture,

chitecture, he erected or new-modeled them on a more convenient or elegant plan than had been known in England since the time of the Romans. Induced also by a laudable economy, he repaired and improved his private manors, and those demesnes which belonged to the Crown, contriving both to make them more commodious and of greater value.

To accomplish these great works, the King was obliged, from the ignorance and indolence of his own subjects, to invite from other countries men skilled in the useful arts. His character for honour and generosity soon collected a great number of strangers of all professions, Gauls, Franks, Armoric Britons, Germans, Frisians, Scots, and Welch, whom he entertained with royal liberality, and by their assistance was enabled to complete in a short time, to the admiration of the neighbouring nations, works which would have employed the whole lives of other Princes. With equal

judgment he provided for the support and regulation of such an infinite number of workmen, to use a phrase of Florentin's, who says they were "*numero pene infinito*;" "almost an infinite number." From this circumstance we may further judge of the greatness of this indefatigable King's engagements, and form some idea of his magnificence. We find in the distribution of his revenues, that he allotted a sixth part of his annual income to the payment of these people, and as at that time they eat and drank at the King's expence, and their wages were very low, our conclusions are confirmed.

Alfred, who seems to have read with attention the character of Solomon, makes the sentiments and actions of that wise King a model for his own: in more instances than one of his history this is observable; but more particularly in his magnificence, and the methods he made use of in the prosecution of his magnificent plans.

The

The course Solomon pursued in building his Temple, where, if thirty thousand were assigned to a work, they only went ten thousand at a time, and having wrought a month, returned to their homes, tarrying there for two months; so that their attendance was required only every third month, being permitted to employ the interval in their domestic occupations, appeared worthy his attention; and as he studied with almost parental tenderness his subjects happiness, he pursued the same considerate plan. Applying this observation to his own occasions, he ordered all his domestics and attendants, the number of whom from his augmented greatness was much increased, to attend in the same rotation, under the command of a superior, who was termed the Master of the Household, and who every quarter renewed his monthly services at court. We may suppose this regulation extended also to his workmen. The body of Nobles being then inconsiderable, at least of such as were enabled by their indepen-

dence to support a constant residence about the court, the King took this method for his more honourable attendance, and for the aggrandizement of his royalty and splendor.

Among the rest of these attendants he provided himself with the best Musicians the age would afford, whose skill he improved by his own taste, and directed their service so as to make them contribute both to his state and pleasure.

The Saxons from their German Ancestors holding hunting in great esteem, as it contributed to health, enured them to hardiness, and rendered dangers (their pursuit being confined to wild and noxious beasts) familiar to them. Alfred stored himself with the means of pursuing this and other princely sports and recreations, and procured huntsmen and falconers of every kind.

Mr.

Mr. Whitaker * fays, “ The education
 “ of a mere military age principally con-
 “ fifted in thofe bodily exercifes, which
 “ taught the pupil an expertnefs in the
 “ management of his arms, and prepared
 “ him for the gracefuller difcharge of the
 “ duties of war. Even the bufinefs of it
 “ was made up of the fame exercifes, the
 “ kindred diverfions of the chace, and the
 “ fofter engagements of fociety. And the
 “ refined employ of the ftudy, that bright-
 “ eft colour in the fecular fcenery of life,
 “ was utterly unknown almoft. Thefe
 “ cares formed fo confiderable a part in the
 “ education of the young, that both Alfred
 “ and Charlemagne provided mafters for
 “ their Sons, as foon as ever their age would
 “ allow it, and had them carefully trained
 “ up in the equal difcipline of arms and
 “ hunting. They likewife claimed fo large
 “ a fhare even of the bufinefs of the adult,
 “ that the latter, among his complicated
 “ fchemes of conqueft, employed himfelf

* Vol. II. fol. 224.

“ daily in the exercises of riding and hunt-
 “ ing ; and even the former, amid the more
 “ engrossing attentions of the public pre-
 “ servation, practised all the arts of hunt-
 “ ing and hawking with unremitting in-
 “ dustry, and even sometimes employed his
 “ vigorous understanding in improving
 “ them, reforming some of the customary
 “ usages, and instructing his falconers, hun-
 “ ters, and dog-boys in others. And,
 “ while these were the principal objects of
 “ active life, Charlemagne was never taught
 “ to write, or Alfred to read ; and the
 “ latter continued unable to read till he was
 “ thirty-eight *, and the former to write
 “ as long as he lived.”

Hitherto

* This assertion of the learned and reverend Author
 of the History of Manchester, that Alfred was unable to
 read till he arrived at the age of thirty-eight, may pos-
 sibly be true ; I know it will be deemed a mark of igno-
 rance and conceit, to endeavour to disprove any part of
 a work that has been so well received, and which is con-
 sidered as the standard of historical truth as far as it re-
 lates to the ages of which he treats ; but the accidental
 manner

Hitherto the public character only of this great King has employed my pen: it has been confined to his noble actions and beneficial ordinances, which I have endeavoured to collect and arrange with as much perspicuity as possible; but I have found them so abundant, and have been so overwhelmed (if I may thus express myself) with the multiplicity of them, that I fear I have not classed them with the precision required, or so as to form a climax worthy of the subject.

I now proceed to his private character, to those various accomplishments and inbred virtues which laid the foundation of that glorious superstructure described in the preceding sheets, and which obtained him the title of Great.

manner hereafter recited of his acquiring a knowledge of his native language, is recorded by Asser, who was his Contemporary, so circumstantially, and with such an air of probability, that it carries great weight with it, and seems to prove that he learnt to read at a much earlier age; whilst the great progress Alfred made in learning, and the many books he wrote, tend to confirm this supposition.

Independent

Independent of his regal qualities, in private life he was the most amiable person this island ever produced. His form was unexceptionable; his mien graceful; and his address easy and genteel. Some paintings which remain of him, and his coins, give us a pleasing idea of his face, in which there appears to be a calm yet lively aspect mingled with dignity, and on which are strongly depicted the noble endowments of his mind. He was of that happy disposition that none of the crosses and vexations he met with (and no Monarch had ever a greater share of them) could ruffle his temper, or rob him of his equanimity. As in his adversity he shewed not any signs of dejection or melancholy, in his prosperity he gave not way to any unbecoming levity, or suffered vanity and arrogance to corrupt his heart. His conversation was agreeable and instructive; but when he harangued his army, or endeavoured to excite the indignation of his Nobles against their Infidel invaders, the energy and fire of a Demosthenes gave

gave weight to his arguments, and rendered them irresistibly persuasive. His affability gained him the love of his subjects; at the same time he knew how to condescend without sinking below his dignity, and how to endear himself to them without lessening their veneration. The natural goodness of his heart prompted him to speak even of his enemies in terms which express great tenderness; but his friends were always mentioned by him with a cordial warmth, and a proper regard to their merits. He never immoderately indulged himself in the luxuries of the table; on the contrary, he was uncommonly moderate in his diet, and restrained all his desires within proper bounds. I need not repeat that he had a large share of valour; the fifty-six battles he fought with the Danes, many of which were gained by his own personal courage and great example, are indisputable testimonies of it. His charities were more than proportioned to his revenues, and were so much the more praise-worthy as they were done without the least

least ostentation. His benevolence and generosity were equal to his other virtues, and he was a sincere professor of Christianity without degenerating into enthusiasm, or imbibing the superstitions at that time so prevalent in the Romish church, as most of his Predecessors had done. Such was Alfred: no wonder therefore that he acquired the name of Great, which Historians of every nation have unanimously bestowed upon him,

But to descend to a more circumstantial detail of his private virtues and literary acquirements. We have already seen to what a low ebb learning was sunk at the time my Hero was born; it is consequently to be supposed that he devoted the earlier part of his life to sports and exercises befitting his years, and had reached the age of twelve before he could read. The Queen his Mother observing him one day greatly delighted with a little book of Saxon poems, beautifully adorned with capital letters in gold and various colours, she said in the

hearing of all her Sons, that she would give the book to him who should first learn it by heart. Alfred, who then knew not even his letters, sought out some assistance, and applied himself so assiduously to the business, that he never left it till he could read and repeat it to his Mother. His further progress in learning was answerable to this beginning; and though his wit was poignant and universal, yet his sense was strong and nervous: industrious and patient of labour and study, he spared no pains to improve it, and to increase his knowledge. The books which he read for this purpose were innumerable; he collected from these whatever pleased him, and translating it into his native language, made it his own. The works which he translated in consequence of this plan were very numerous, and though the Saxon was then a dry and unadorned language, destitute of significant phrases or expressive terms, especially in arts and sciences, yet were his versions so full, so proper, and so comprehensive, that they
were

were intelligible to the meanest of his Readers ; whilst the just and lively mode of expression he made use of rendered them pleasing to the most learned. He at length became the most acute Scholar of the age in which he lived ; a Grammarian, a Rhetorician, a Philosopher, an Historian, the Prince of Saxon Poësy, a Musician, a Geometrician, and an excellent Architect.

But these acquirements were only valued by Alfred as they enabled him to be of service to his people : all the provident and salutary steps he had hitherto taken for rectifying the civil and religious government of his kingdom, were not sufficient to satisfy his anxiety, or to prevent his further endeavours to bring about a perfect reformation of their manners, by totally eradicating that savage disposition which a long war, and a constant intercourse with a barbarous and unlettered people had produced. Considering with himself on how weak a foundation that amendment is built, which is supported

ported only by terror and restraint, he applied his thoughts to devise some means by which he might purify their minds, and reclaim them from that ferocity with which they were tainted. Imitating the antient founders of commonwealths, Jupiter, Bacchus, Hercules, Orpheus, and Amphion, who, from the gentle methods they pursued to make their subjects happy, are some of them feigned to draw the savage beasts after them, to charm the woods and rocks, and to compel even senseless trees and stones to follow them, Alfred endeavoured to instil into his people, by the same persuasive mode, the principles of civility, justice, honour, and religion.

To this purpose he trusted not entirely to the instruction they should receive from the learned men he had procured for their benefit, but he wrote and repeated to them on every occasion short instructive sentences, proverbs, and fables, such as were better suited to their capacities, and to those times
of

of barbarism, than more elaborate discourses would have been. How they co-operated with the other regulations he had made, and what happy effects proceeded from them, has been already described. His whole people, noble and ignoble, soon acquired a taste for literature. He frequently laid aside the awe and terror which the presence of Sovereignty inspires, to converse with them more freely; and with so much judgment intermixed mildness with reproof, and cheerfulness with gravity in his discourse, that he won them to imbibe his instructions, and in a short time brought learning and urbanity, which had been hitherto held in contempt, into universal estimation.

The following extract from a manuscript in the Bodleian library will serve as a specimen of these proverbial instructions, and give some faint idea of his manner of writing; I say faint idea, because as there are no traces to be met with of this work in the Saxon tongue, and translations generally diminish

minish the native elegance of a composition, we may naturally suppose they have lost much of their original beauty. The manuscript from which the underneath has been taken, is only a miscellaneous collection of some later Author, who, according to his best abilities, has put together in very old broken English such of the sayings of King Alfred as he could collect, some of them in rhyme and others in prose: as they contain such useful maxims for persons of every rank, even of the present age, and breathe throughout the whole such a spirit of piety and religion, without apologizing for the length I shall insert the whole of them.

The pleasing manner in which he delivered them, and the nervous force of his writings in the original, we must endeavour to supply from our imaginations, remembering what the Monk of Malmſbury expressly testifies of him, “ That no man was
 “ more ready and quick of apprehension
 “ than this Prince, or more elegant in the
 S “ delivery

“ delivery of what he had conceived.” And Ethelward, who lived soon after Alfred, tells us, “ That his translation of Boëtius was “ written in so pathetic a style, that it drew “ tears from every one by whom it was “ read.” The beginning imports, that they were delivered by the King at an assembly of the chief persons of his kingdom, called together on some public occasion, when this sagacious Monarch took the opportunity to mingle his admonitions with the business of government, that they might be the more readily diffused throughout his dominions.

At Difford seten Thaines manie,
 Fele Biscopes, and fele boclered,
 Crles prude, knihtes egloche.
 Ther was Cyle Alfrich, of the Lage swuthwile,
 And ec Alured, Engle-hirde, Engle derling.
 On Englonð he was King, hem he gan leren
 Swo him heren mihten, hu hi here lif leden scolden.

Alured

Alured he was on Engelond a King well swithe
strong.

He was King and Clerk. Well he lubien Gods
werk.

He was wise on his word, and war on his speche.
He was the wiseſte man that was on Engelond.

I. Thus qwath Alured engle frofre.

Wolde ye nu liuen and buſſen pure loverd,
And he yu wolde wiſen wiſeliche winges,
Hu ye mihten werlds wurtheceipe welden,
And ec pure Soule ſamne to Criſte.

Wiſe weren the cwethen the ſaide the King Alured.

Mildeliche I mune yu mine dere frend, arme
And edilede luuiende, that ye all dzed pure
Drihten Criſt luuiend him and licen, for he is
Louerd of Liſ, he is one God ober all Godneſſe.
He is one bliſſe ober alle bleſſedneſs.
He is one manne, milde maiſter. he one folce fader,
And frofre. he is one riht wiſ and riche King,
That him ne ſeal be pane noht of his will
Hwo him here on werlde wurthend and eth.

II. Thus ewath Alured, engle frofre,
 He mai no riht cing ben under Crist self,
 But he be boclered, and wis a loage,
 And he hise writes well icweme, and he cunne
 Letres locen him selve hu he scal his lond
 Lagelice helden.

This will suffice as a specimen of the original : according to the more modern English of Sir John Spelman (of which I have given several stanzas more than of the old, as without them the extract would have been incomplete) it runs thus :

There sat at Sifford many Thaness,
 Many Bishops, many learned men,
 Wise Earls, and awful Knights.
 There was Earl Alfrich very learned in the law :
 There was present also Alfred, England's Heardman,
 England's Darling.
 He was King of England : he taught them
 That could hear him, how they should lead their lives.

Alfred

Alfred was a King of England, that was very strong.
He was both a King and a scholar : he loved well God's
work.

He was wise, and advised of his talk.

He was the wisest man that was in all England.

I. Thus quoth Alfred, England's comfort ;
Oh that you would now love and long after your Lord,
He would govern you wisely,
That you might have honour in this world,
And yet unite your souls to Christ.
Wise were the sayings of King Alfred.

I mildly admonish thee my dear friend, and beloved,
Beest thou poor or rich, that thou wholly dread
Thy Lord Christ, love him, and delight in him ; for
he is
Lord of life, he is one God above all goodness :
He is a Bliss above all blessedness :
He is one man, a mild master : he is one common Father,
And comfort of all people : he is so wise and rich a
King,
That he that in this world shall serve him,
Shall not fail ought of his will.

II. Thus quoth Alfred, England's comfort :

One can be no right ruling King under Christ himself,
Unless he have learning, know the law,
And understand the use of his writts,
And be able by his own reading to inform himself
How to govern his land according to law.

III. Thus quoth Alfred, England's comfort : the Earl

And the Atheling are under the King.

To govern the land according to law.

The Clergyman and the Knight must both alike judge
uprightly :

For as a man sows, so shall he reap ;

And every man's judgment comes upon him home to his
own doors.

IV. Thus quoth Alfred : It behoveth the Knight

Advisedly to look to provide against dearth and famine,

And to have care of the military expedition, that the
Church

Have quiet, and the Husbandman be at peace,

His seed to sow, his meadows to mow,

And to follow his ploughing to the behoof of us all.

This is the duty of a Knight to see that these things go
as they should.

V. Thus

V. Thus quoth Alfred: Without wisdom wealth is worth little. Though a man has an hundred and seventy acres sown with gold, and all grew like corn, yet were all that wealth worth nothing, unless that of an enemy one could make it become a friend. For what differs gold from a stone, but by discreet using it?

VI. Thus quoth Alfred: A young man must never give himself to evil, though good befalls him not to his mind, nor though he enjoys not every thing he would: for Christ can when he will give good after evil and wealth after grace. Happy is he that is made for it.

XIII. Thus quoth Alfred: A wise child is the blessing of his father. If thou has a child, whilst it is yet but little, teach it the precepts that belong to a man, and when it is grown up it will follow them; then shall thy child become such as shall recompense thee: but if thou lettest him go after his own will, when he cometh to age it will grieve him sore; and he shall curse him that had the tuition of him: then shall thy child transgress thy admonition, and it would be better for thee that thou hadst no child; for a child unborn is better than one un-beaten.

XXVII. Thus quoth Alfred: If thou growest into age, hast wealth, and canst take no pleasure, nor hast strength to govern thyself, then thapke the Lord for all that he hath sent thee, for thy own life, and for the day's light, and for all the pleasure he has made for man; and whatsoever becometh of thee, say thou, come what will, God's will be welcome.

XXVIII. Thus quoth Alfred: Worldly wealth at last cometh to the worms, and all the glory of it to dust, and our life is soon gone. And though one had the rule of all this middle world, and of the wealth in it, yet could he keep his life but a short while. All thy happiness would but work thy misery, unless thou couldst purchase thee Christ. Therefore when we lead our lives as God has taught us, we then best serve ourselves. For then be assured that he will support us: for so said Solomon that wise man, well is he that doth good in this world, for at last he cometh where he findeth it.

XXIX. Thus quoth Alfred: My dear Son, set thee now beside me, and I will deliver thee true instruction. My Son, I feel that my hour is coming. My countenance is wan. My——my days are almost done. We now
must

must part. I shall to another world, and thou shalt be left alone in all my wealth. I pray thee (for thou art my dear Child) strive to be a Father, and a Lord to thy people; be thou the childrens Father, and the widows Friend; comfort thou the poor, and shelter the weak; and with all thy might, right that which is wrong. And thou govern thyself by law; then shall the Lord love thee, and God above all things shall be thy reward, call upon him to advise thee in all thy need, and so he shall help thee, the better to compass that which thou wouldst.

This remnant is but an imperfect copy of something more perfectly delivered by the King. It appears to have been spoken at different times: the concluding paragraph, which contains a system of advice important to every Sovereign, seems to have been particularly addressed by Alfred, whilst he lay on his death-bed, to his son Edward; but every part of it displays his good sense and piety, and convinces us that through every hour of his life, even in his last, the welfare of his people employed his thoughts,

thoughts, and excited his most fervent wishes. The other works of Alfred are very numerous; the following ten books are of his own composing or collecting :

Breviarium quoddam collectum ex legibus Trojanorum, Græcorum, Britannorum, Saxonum, & Danorum.

Visi-Saxonum Leges.

Instituta quædam.

Contra Judices iniquos.

Dieta Sapientum.

Regum fortunæ variæ.

Parabolæ & Sales.

Acta Magistratuum.

Collectiones Chronicorum.

Manuale Meditationum.

These that follow were translated by him into the Saxon language :

Hormestarii Pauli Orosii.

Pastorale D. Gregorii.

Dialogus ejusdem Gregorii.

Gesta

*Gesta Anglorum Bedæ.**Boëtius de Consolatione.**Molmutinæ Leges.**Afferii Sententiæ.**Psalterium Davidicum.*

These are the literary productions of Alfred as collected by Mr. Bale ; but Malmfbury tells us of many more. An old manuscript in the Bodleian library mentions, that he translated the Fables of Æsop from the Greek both into Latin and Saxon ; and Mr. Fox says, that he compiled a history in his native language, which was called, The Story of Alfred ; like Cæsar, giving a commentary of his own military actions. By these we see the extent of his genius and the bent of his mind ; he did not employ his time and abilities on idle speculations, or indulge himself in such writings as tended only to amuse, but, contemplative and industrious, he chose and prosecuted such studies only as he might convert to
his

his own private benefit or the public advantage.

However, his sedate disposition tinged not his writings with melancholy; his mind, notwithstanding his natural seriousness, was as void of sadness as timidity; he was therefore ever free and affable to all men, preserving a constant vigour and alacrity of spirit; and as to his courage, it was so innate in him, that fear could not make the least momentary impression upon his heart, though it often assailed him in desperate and unexpected encounters. Free from the turbulent ostentation of meaner spirits, his valour was always proportioned to the exigence of the occasion which called it forth; that served, it quietly resolved itself into that virtue which was next required: neither was his heart alone conscious of this native intrepidity; Fortune, on innumerable occasions, put it to the severest trials, to the great support of his friends, the terror of his adversaries, and to the admiration of both.

both. But the natural turn of his mind was wholly inclined to literature, and more particularly to religious knowledge; with reluctance therefore did he accept the crown.

When we consider the number of his literary works, with the various duties which called for a constant exertion of all his talents, we are naturally led to wonder how he could find time to complete them; but Alfred was one of those happy geniuses to whom every thing they do seem natural, and who are constantly employed without appearing to be so. He knew too well the value of time to lose the least part of it; and so far was he from being like most Princes, who imagine their high station gives them the privilege of spending all their time on diversions and trifles, that he endeavoured to make the most of every moment. When he lay hid in the Isle of Athelney, he made a vow to set apart for the service of God the third part of his time, as soon as he should be

be restored to a state of tranquillity: he performed this solemn protestation with great punctuality, dedicating eight hours every day to acts of devotion, eight hours to public affairs, and as many to sleep, study, and necessary refreshments.

As the use of clocks or hour-glasses were not then introduced into England, it was difficult to make a right division of the time by night and by day: wherefore the King observing as near as possible the time that the wax-candles with which he was ordinarily served were consuming, he found out such a proportion as would keep a just measure for the four and twenty hours. His method was this: he took as much wax as weighed seventy-two pennyweights, which he caused to be made into six candles, every candle weighing twelve pennyweights, and of the length of twelve inches, with the divisions of the inches distinctly marked upon them; these being lighted successively one immediately after another, did regularly

larly burn four hours apiece ; the six candles thus lasting out the twenty-four hours. The watching of these he committed to the keepers of his chapel, and they constantly from time to time gave him notice of their wasting : but because in windy weather the candles burned irregularly, by which means the intended calculation failed, the King with his usual ingenuity invented an expedient to prevent their waste. Though glass had long before been brought into England by Benedict the Abbot, for the use of a monastery which he built on the banks of the river Wyre in Northumberland, yet it was then esteemed a rarity, and not easily to be procured ; he therefore caused some fine white horn to be scraped so thin as to become transparent, and let into close frames of wood, which defended the candles from the injury of the weather, without obstructing the calculation of the hours. The use of this invention being conspicuous it soon grew common ; and though at this day lanterns are but of vulgar estimation, yet the

the device was ingenious, and shewed the universality of Alfred's genius, who thought nothing beneath his attention that was of real service.

The hours thus appropriated by the King to devotion were never broke in upon; as his religious turn had shewn itself soon after he arrived at a state of manhood, so it constantly accompanied all the actions of his whole life. Though he was bred to war, and continually exercised in all the horrors and cruelties unavoidably attendant on the profession of arms, particularly against such savage and licentious enemies, yet could not the roughness of his employment dis-temper the natural tenderness of his heart, or any outrage of his oppressive foes harden it against the emotions of Pity: amidst all their provocations he sought out a way to shew mercy to them, and was never so truly pleased as when he could bring the war to a conclusion on moderate terms. No wrong, no damage committed on their part, no advantage

vantage gained over them on his, but what were readily remitted and obliterated, if his adversaries would embrace Christianity. Inspired by the true spirit of that benevolent religion, he sought rather to convert them to a faith which tended to civilize and make them happy, than by triumphing over them to acquire the empty title of Conqueror. It was only on these occasions that Alfred's heart ever exceeded the bounds of moderation ; when a zeal for religion, and his natural humane disposition, made him sometimes a dupe to the artifices of his enemies, he certainly may be accused of weakness. This accounts for the frequent instances we meet with in the former part of his reign, of his being involved in difficulties through the imposition of the Danes, who were sure to take advantage of his easiness, and to begin afresh their depredations : however at length his humanity received its reward ; assisted by that Power who is ever ready to succour depressed virtue, his truth and integrity triumphed over the wiles and machi-

T

nations

nations of his foes, and without any needless exertions of severity he gathered unblasted laurels *.

Notwithstanding Alfred's religious turn, and his zeal for the propagation of Christianity, neither enthusiasm or bigotry held any dominion over his mind; his religion was that of a man of sense, allowing for the prejudice of his education, and the superstitions of the church to which alone he

* Alfred's orders to the Commanders of his ships, to give no quarter, on his first fitting out a fleet to oppose the landing of the Dânes, might be urged as an objection to this part of my eulogium; but though these instructions at first sight may appear cruel, yet, when considered maturely, they must be deemed no less prudent than they were indispensably needful; the frequent perjuries of that people making it imprudent to confide any more in their promises or their oaths, and the reinforcements that were continually pouring in on every side, threatening the kingdom with a repetition of those horrors they had before occasioned, such rigorous methods were absolutely necessary to strike a terror into those Rovers, that by means of their example others may be deterred from infesting his coasts, and forced to prosecute their piracies in a different part of the world.

could

could unite himself. He did not blindly submit to the direction of the court of Rome, as his Father and several of his Saxon Predecessors had done, but extended his sovereignty over both the Clergy and the Laity: he would not admit that the church in his dominions was subject to a foreign power, and exempt from the jurisdiction of the state at home, as Anselm, Becket, and other bigotted Priests afterwards contended; but as the Clergy were part of his subjects, and their persons and fortunes under his protection, he expected they should be answerable to him for a breach of his laws.

It has been said by the favourers of the court of Rome, that Alfred disclaimed all dominion over the ecclesiastical part of his subjects, and held himself rather as a Subject of the Clergy than as their Sovereign, humbly acknowledging the papal supremacy: but the King had too much spirit and understanding to make these concessions; though in spiritual matters he reve-

renced the Pope as universal Vicar, he exercised his regal authority absolutely, and by his heroic actions and great character, rather inspired the holy see with awe, than made any submissive acknowledgments.

This the following circumstances confirm. Although it happened that all the bishoprics in Wexsex, viz. Winchester, Cornwall, Sherborne, Wells, and Cridda, were for three years together vacant, and placed by the King under the care of the Archbishop of Canterbury, yet no offence was taken at this step by the court of Rome; but on a similar occasion, in his son Edward's reign, the first intimation that Prince received of the Pope's displeasure, was by a curse and a sentence of excommunication. In the preamble to Alfred's laws is inserted the decalogue, where the second commandment relative to graven images is omitted, according to the usage established by order of the second Nicene Council held about a century before, when it was expunged;

ed; but the King, to shew that he would submit to no regulations which were contradictory to his own judgment, boldly inserts a tenth in the room of the prohibited injunction, writing with his own hand, "Thou shalt not make to thyself any golden Gods." So public a contradiction of the tenets of the church of Rome must have drawn on Alfred severe anathemas, had he ever before made any submissions to the Papal Court, or had it dared to have exerted that boasted sovereignty, which through the ignorance of the times was nearly become universal. We also see that when the King sought for learned men, and procured them from many parts of Christendom, yet he received none from Rome, though he often sent thither, agreeable to the custom of the age, presents and devout oblations, and was answered in return with holy favours. And when Scotus Erigena was so persecuted by the Pope, for having written something in opposition to the See of Rome, that even the Emperor's

countenance was not a sufficient protection for him, Alfred invited him to his court, and bestowed many favours on him without dreading the Pope's displeasure. These proofs are sufficient to contradict the assertions of Baronius, Harpsfield, and others, who boast of the obedience and conformity of this glorious Prince to their Ecclesiastical Sovereign.

But at the same time that he thus behaved towards the Court of Rome with a becoming dignity, he was most deservedly honoured by the Pope, who presented him with a considerable number of relics, esteemed a valuable present by all the Children of the Holy Father; and at Alfred's desire (a more convincing mark of his respect for him) he freed the Saxon college, established by Ina and Offa there, from all the tributes and impositions which had hitherto been laid upon it. So much was he beloved and honoured by the neighbouring Princes, that he obtained by their unanimous

mous consent the name of Great; and so extensive was his fame, that he received letters and rich presents from Abel the Patriarch of Jerusalem. No Prince had ever a greater claim to these flattering distinctions; nor could the title of Conqueror be with more justice bestowed than on Alfred, for he had not only vanquished the invaders of his country, but the vices of his people, and his own frailties.

Perplexed with the number and variety of his virtues and accomplishments, and at a loss how to conclude my detail of a life so abundantly fraught with heroic achievements and beneficent acts, I shall call in a respectable Author to my aid, and in his words sum up the character of my Hero. He likewise, lost in the immensity of the subject, thus exclaims: "Oh! Alfred, the
 "wonder and astonishment of all ages, how
 "shall I pay thee that tribute of praise thy
 "worth deserves!" then recovering himself, he proceeds with more composure;

“ If we consider his singular exercises of re-
 “ ligious, one would think he had never
 “ forsaken the cloister ; if his wars, that
 “ he had spent his days in a camp ; if his
 “ learning and writings, that he had passed
 “ all his time at an university ; if his re-
 “ gulations for the good of his people and
 “ the security of his kingdom, that he had
 “ made laws the study of his life, and the
 “ art of government the only subject of his
 “ reflections.”

Such was Alfred ; no wonder then that
 his subjects lamented his death, which hap-
 pened in the fifty-second year of his age,
 with unabating sorrow ; and whilst the
 name of Englishman retains its wonted va-
 lue, will his name be respected, and his
 memory held sacred, as the first founder of
 those invaluable privileges we continue to
 enjoy. He was born at Wantage in Berk-
 shire, a principal manor of the West-
 Saxon Kings in the year 849, and died in
 the

the year 900, after a reign of twenty-nine years.

The vicissitudes which happened to the corpse of this Prince were not unsuited to the transitions of his life : no sooner was it interred in the cathedral of Winchester than the Canons, whom he had kept to the duties of their function with a strictness that ill agreed with their indolence and luxury, pretended to be disturbed by his ghost; which induced his son King Edward to remove his body to the new monastery that he had founded in his life-time. There it remained till the dissolution of monastries, when Doctor Richard Fox, Bishop of Winchester, ordered the bones of all the Saxon Kings to be collected and put into leaden coffins, with inscriptions containing every Monarch's name. These chests were afterwards placed on the top of a wall of curious workmanship, built by him to inclose the chancel of the cathedral. But Sir William Waller, who commanded the parliament's forces

forces at the taking of Winchester in the year 1642, entered the cathedral, broke the windows, destroyed the monuments, threw down the leaden chests, and violating those sacred cabinets of the dead, scattered their bones all over the church. As many as could be collected together were afterwards brought to Oxford, and humanely lodged in the repository adjoining to the Bodleian library.

His life and actions have been celebrated by the Writers of every age since his death, with the choicest expressions of praise: Sir John Spelman has selected from among them the following Latin verses, written by Henry Huntingdon, and has given the annexed translation.

*Nobilitas innata tibi probitatis honorem
(Armipotens Alfrede) dedit; probitasque laborem:
Perpetuumque labor nomen, cui mixta dolori
Gaudia semper erant, spes semper mixta timori.*

Si

*Si modo victor eras, ad crastina bella parabas.
Cui vestes sudare jugi, cui sica cruore
Tincta jugi, quantum sit onus regnare, probarunt.
Non fuit immensi quisquam per climata mundi,
Cui tot in adversis vel respirare liceret.
Nec tamen aut ferro contritus ponere ferrum,
Aut gladio potuit vitæ finisse labores.
Jam post transactas vitæ regnique dolores,
Christus & sit vera quies, sceptrumque perenne.*

Thy true nobility of mind and blood
(Oh warlike Alfred) gave thee to be good.
Goodness industrious made thee ; industry
Got thee a name to all posterity.
'Twixt mixed hopes and fears, 'twixt joy and grief,
Thou ever felt'st distress, and found'st relief.
Victor this day, next day thou dost ne'rth'less,
I' th' field dispute thy former day's success.
O'ercome this day, next day for all this blow
Thou giv'st or tak'st another overthrow.
Thy brows from sweat, thy sword from blood ne'er
dry,
What 'twas to reign so to us signify.

The

The world cannot produce so much as one
 That thro' the like adversities has gone :
 Yet found'st thou not the rest thou sought'st for
 here,
 But with a crown Christ gives it thee elsewhere.

To this I shall subjoin the following
 translation, as more smooth and harmonious,
 though perhaps not more expressive.

Innate nobility of mind and blood
 Inspired thee (warlike Alfred) to be good.
 Thy virtuous labours gain'd thee lasting fame,
 And to posterity record thy name.
 Mixt were thy hopes and fears, thy joys and grief,
 Distress thou often felt, yet found relief.
 Victor one day, the next, so hard thy lot,
 Forced to dispute what former days had got :
 Or vanquish'd now, anon with martial glow
 You won the field, or found an overthrow.
 Thy brows ne'er dry from sweat, thy sword from
 stain,
 Prove how laborious 'twas like thee to reign.

The

The world cannot produce a man who bore
 With equal fortitude such woes before.
 Yet tho' throughout thy life, and various reign,
 You fought for rest on earth but fought in vain,
 Tho' scepter'd peace the world did thee deny,
 Christ crowns thee now with endless rest on high.

King Alfred had several children by Alswitha his Queen, some of them, particularly Edmund, whom he designed for his Successor, died before him : those that survived him were two Sons and three Daughters. Edward the eldest succeeded him on the throne : his second son Ethelward, bred a scholar at Oxford, was a very learned man, and died in the fortieth year of his age : Ethelflida, his eldest Daughter, who was a woman of more than feminine spirit, and possessed so many of her Father's virtues as enabled her to be of great service in the succeeding reign, was married to Ethelred, Earl of Mercia : his second daughter, Ethelgeoa, was Abbess of the new monastery at Ethelingey :
 and

and his youngest, named by some Alswitha, by others, Alfrith, was married to Baldwin, Earl of Flanders. Some Authors mention a fourth Daughter, whom they call Elfrida, and which seems conformable to one part of the will of this Monarch, published by Archbishop Parker at the end of his edition of Afferius Menevensis, where it is said he left his four Daughters a legacy of four hundred pounds, to each a hundred; a sum, though apparently very trifling for the Daughters of a King, yet, according to the present valuation of money, it was equal to a very considerable portion at this time *.

The

* In the eighth century, says Mr. Whitaker, the value of one pound was equal to sixty pounds of the present money. The following table of rates will shew, that according to this calculation every article of life or convenience was considerably dearer at that period than it is now.

In

The male Descendents of Alfred wore the crown of this kingdom during ten successions. When Edward his immediate

In the Saxon part of the island.

		l.	s.	d.	Equal comparative value.
A ram	-	0	0	4	- 1 0 0
A middling horse	-	0	10	0	- 30 0 0
An ox	-	0	2	6	- 7 10 0
A cow	-	0	1	8	- 5 0 0
A sow	-	0	0	10	- 2 10 0
A sheep	-	0	0	5	- 1 5 0

In the British or Welsh part.

A stallion	-	-	1	0	0	-	60	0	0	
A cart-horse	-	-	0	5	0	-	15	0	0	
A horse lowest rate			0	5	0	-	15	0	0	
Ditto highest	-	10	0	0		-	600	0	0	
A cow	-	-	0	5	0	-	15	0	0	
An ox	-	-	-	0	5	0	-	15	0	0
A sheep	-	-	0	0	4	-	1	0	0	
A goose	-	-	0	0	1	-	0	5	0	
A gander	-	-	0	0	2	-	0	10	0	
A hen	-	-	-	0	0	1	-	0	5	0
A pair of shoes	-		0	0	4	-	1	0	0	
A coat	-	-	-	0	2	0	-	6	0	0
A house-dog	-	-	0	0	4	-	1	0	0	
A sheep-dog	-	-	0	5	0	-	15	0	0	

Successor

Successor mounted the throne, the kingdom was almost equally divided between the English and Danes ; and though these aliens had remained quiet during the latter part of the late King's reign, overawed by his power, and afraid to provoke a person of his abilities, yet they only waited for an opportunity to shake off their yoke and recommence hostilities. An occasion soon offered ; for Ethelward, the Son of Ethelbert an elder Brother of Alfred's, being now grown to man's estate, he laid claim to the crown as his due by birth-right ; asserting that Ethelwulph, his Grandfather, had acted with injustice in leaving his kingdom to all his Sons successively, contrary to the established custom of his Predecessors : he consequently took up arms in support of his pretensions, and being readily joined by the Danes, once more involved the nation in a bloody and destructive war. Victory however at length, after numberless contests, having declared in favour of Edward, he found himself firmly established on the throne

throne of his Father. In this he was greatly assisted by his sister Elflida, who gave, during this war, such signal proofs of courage and intrepidity, that she acquired the title of King Elflida.

Edward proved himself worthy of his great Progenitor, by an imitation of his virtues : his Father's fame would of itself have ennobled him, but he acquired an equal degree of glory from the same source—his own actions. Like Alfred, he was respected by his neighbours, and beloved by his subjects ; like him, he was intrepid, vigilant, and prudent ; but in one respect greater, as he never lost a battle, or suffered the least impeachment of his military skill. His character in private life was as deserving of our praise as his great actions : the methods he pursued in the education of his children was worthy of imitation ; his Sons were so inured to study that they were masters of every useful science, and fit to assume the reins of government whenever it

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should become necessary ; whilst his Daughters not only exercised the distaff, and employed themselves at their needles, but were instructed in all those branches of learning which were proper to adorn their minds.

Edgina, the first wife of this Monarch, though no more than a shepherd's daughter, was raised to her high station merely on account of her beauty and amiable accomplishments. Whilst she was yet a girl, and feeding the flocks of her Father, she one day fell asleep, and dreamed that the moon shone out of her belly so bright as to illuminate all England. This dream she innocently communicated to an old gentlewoman who had nursed young Edward at the court of Alfred : the woman, struck with the oddity of it, and pleased with the charms of the lovely maid, took her home and educated her at her own expence. Edgina soon became remarkable for her beauty and other endowments. Edward seeing her on a visit
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he paid his nurse, fell in love with her, and it is supposed privately married her.

The first fruits of their love was a Son, who on account of the circumstances of the dream was named Athelstan, that is, the most Noble. His Grandfather took uncommon care of this young Prince's education; he recommended him in his infancy to his daughter Elflida, under whom he was brought up, and instructed in the art of war by her husband Ethelred, one of the greatest warriors of the times. When he was of a proper age to appear at court he was introduced by his noble Tutor, and charmed Alfred so much by his beauty and sprightly behaviour, that he foretold (as before recounted) in a prophetic rapture, his succession to the crown,

Though several Historians have represented the Mother of this young Prince as Edward's concubine, yet there are very strong proofs of her being his lawful Wife; notwithstanding there are no positive ones

extant of their marriage. An Author who gives the story of Edward's amour, speaking afterwards of the rest of his children, says, "Edward had Edwyn and others by another Wife;" which is a direct testimony that Edward was married to Edgina. And though another Writer says, "By a most noble Lady he had his eldest son Athelstan, and by his Queen Edgiva he had three Sons," his words rather confirm than refute this conclusion; for the Mother of Athelstan dying before Edward came to the crown, though she was his Wife, she could not properly be stiled his Queen; nor could she have acquired the title of Most Noble Lady, as she was by birth only the Daughter of a Shepherd, unless from her marriage. To this might be added, that the care Alfred took of her Son's education, his fondness for him in his infancy, and his bestowing on him the order of Knighthood as his presumptive Heir, are strong proofs of Edgina's honour and Athelstan's legitimacy.

This

This Prince succeeded his father Edward on his throne; and having trod in the steps of both his worthy Predecessors, he gained, like them, the affection of his subjects and the esteem of the neighbouring Potentates. The only blemish that could be imputed to him during his reign, is the supposed murder of his brother Edwyn, which is thus related. One of Athelstan's Nobles accused Edwyn of being concerned in a conspiracy against the King's life; the King too readily believed the accusation, and notwithstanding the Prince's protestations of his innocence, caused him to be put on board a leaky ship, accompanied by his armour-bearer and page, and exposed to the dangers of the sea: Edwyn, unable to bear the severity of the weather and the want of food, leaped overboard in a fit of despair and was drowned. Some time after, as the Nobleman who had instigated the King to this act of cruelty attended on him, one of his feet happened to slip, and he would have fallen had he not recovered himself

with the other, which caused him to say, in a jocular manner, "See how one brother assists another:" this observation being construed by Athelstan into a reproach, he caused a strict examination to be made into the circumstances of his Brother's pretended crime, and finding he had been falsely accused, ordered the Nobleman to be put to a cruel death. To expiate his own guilt, he underwent a severe penance for seven years, and built two monasteries in Dorsetshire. But as William of Malmesbury, who relates the story thus circumstantially, at the same time brings Athelstan's great kindness to his other Brothers and Sisters as an argument against the credibility of it, and further acknowledges, that it was only grounded on some old ballads; and as there are many other circumstances which Mr. Rider has collected with great judgment, that seem to disprove it, I shall agree with him in his opinion, That the bare suggestion of Athelstan's guilt is owing to weakness, credulity, or malice.

Edmund,

Edmund, the eldest Son then living of King Edward by his second Wife, mounted the throne on the death of his brother Athelstan, in the eighteenth year of his age, and was crowned at Kingston with great solemnity. He also supported the honours of the House of Alfred in their original splendor, till an extraordinary accident put an end to his life after a short but glorious reign. As Edmund was one day sitting at table with his Nobles, at the solemnization of a festival at Puckle-church in Gloucestershire, he observed one Leolf, a notorious felon, whom he had banished the kingdom for his crimes, seated at one of the tables in the same hall: enraged at his insolence, the King ordered him to be seized; but finding the villain made a desperate resistance, he was so exasperated, that he started from his seat, seized him by the hair, and pulled him to the ground, falling at the same time upon him: Leolf now looking on his death as inevitable, drew his dagger, and in a paroxysm of desperation plunged it

into the bosom of the young King, who instantly expired. The Nobles who were witnesses to this foul deed, fell upon the regicide and soon dispatched him; but this atonement was inadequate to the loss of a valuable King, cut off in the flower of his age.

The two Sons of Edmund being infants, Edred, his Brother, was elected by the unanimous suffrages of the Nobility and Clergy. Inheriting the valour of his Forefathers, he chastised the perfidious Danes, who, since the death of Alfred, had constantly interrupted the tranquillity of all his Successors. But during a calm which followed, he spent his time in superstitious ceremonies, and became the dupe of the famous Dunstan, Abbot of Glastonbury, who at length acquired unlimited power over him: death however put a stop to this King's censurable devotion to the Monks in the tenth year of his reign.

Edwy,

Edwy, the Brother of the deceased Monarch, succeeded him. This Prince, who was so remarkably handsome that he acquired the surname of Pancalus, or the Fair, came to the throne with sentiments much more unfavourable to the Monks than his Predecessor had done, consequently his character is not placed by the Historians of that age, who were chiefly of their order, in the same pleasing view. The young King had married a very beautiful lady, called Ethelgiva, a name which shews that she was of a noble, if not of the royal family: his fondness for his Wife weakening the influence which Dunstan wished to usurp over him, as he had done over his Brother, the Abbot determined on her destruction; and on the very day of his coronation met with an opportunity of putting this design in execution. After dinner the youthful King, perhaps to avoid excessive drinking, withdrew to enjoy the conversation of his beauteous Bride, who was accompanied by her Mother in an adjoining apartment.

partment. The Nobility were displeased at this indecorum, and Dunstan laid hold of the occasion to increase their resentment, by pointing out the impropriety of the King's conduct. Not satisfied with doing this, he rushed into the Queen's apartments, and, after reproaching Edwy for his fondness, dragged him back to the company. Such an outrage could not fail of exciting the young Monarch's anger, and notwithstanding the powerful opposition made by the Monks, he found means to banish the imperious Priest.

Odo, Archbishop of Canterbury, thinking the dignity of the Priesthood wounded by the exile of Dunstan, in the first transports of his fury conveyed away by force from the palace, in the absence of her Husband, the beautiful Ethelgiva, and ordering her lovely face to be seared with a red hot iron, banished her for life to Ireland. After this the Monks, by aspersing the character of the King, raised an insurrection
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against him, and set up his younger brother Edgar, a youth about thirteen years old, for their King, who immediately recalled Dunstan * and put himself under his direction. This revolution, added to the loss he had sustained through the malice of his enemies of a Wife whom he loved with unparalleled tenderness, had such an effect on the mind of Edwy, that he fell into an excess of melancholly, which put an end to his life after he had reigned about four years.

The reign of Edgar was remarkable for the uninterrupted peace his kingdom enjoyed, from whence he acquired the title

* The famous story of St. Dunstan and the Devil is thus related by the Monkish Historians: "As the Abbot was one day employed in his cell near Glastonbury, in making a gold cup of curious workmanship, the Devil appeared to him in the shape of a fine woman, tempting him to sin: Dunstan perceiving in spirit who he was, took up a pair of red hot tongs, and catching hold of the Devil by the nose, made him howl in such a horrible manner that he was heard all over the neighbourhood."

of Edgar the Peaceable. This calm however was not owing to a want of courage, or a distaste for war, but to the state of defence he kept his dominions in; by which means he became formidable both to his own subjects and the neighbouring powers. He guarded his coasts with a formidable fleet, far superior to any that had been fitted out by his Predecessors, and more powerful than those of all the European Princes joined together.

The number of vessels which composed his navy is variously related: some Authors say that they amounted to no less than four thousand sail; but they all agree in supposing them to be upwards of three thousand: an amazing increase since the reign of Alfred, and a proof that the Anglo-Saxons must have carried on a considerable commerce, even in those times when we have no mention of their maritime affairs. This invincible fleet Edgar divided into three squadrons, one of which was constantly

stantly stationed on the eastern, another on the western, and a third on the northern coasts of his kingdom. Every year this assiduous Monarch went on board one of these divisions, and scoured the seas till he came to the place where the next was stationed; which he went on board, and in the same manner proceeded till he had sailed round the whole island: by this means he rendered every invasion impracticable, and effectually asserted his sovereignty over the seas.

During the reign of this Prince the kingdom was cleared from the numerous droves of wolves, by which some part of it, particularly Wales, had been infested. Hitherto no remedy could be found for this evil; but Edgar thought of an expedient that proved effectual: instead of the tribute which the Welch annually paid, in the mountains of whose country they chiefly bred, he agreed to receive three hundred heads of those ravenous creatures; at the

same time he published a general pardon for all offences; on condition each criminal brought within a limited time a certain number of their tongues, in proportion to his crimes. By this means the ravages of those destructive beasts in less than three years were put an end to, and their species totally extirpated:

The marriage of this Prince having some extraordinary circumstances attending it, though well known from being the story on which Mr. Mason founded his incomparable Masque of *Elfrida*, I shall insert it for the entertainment of those of my Readers who may be unacquainted with it. The King having been informed that the Earl of Devonshire had a Daughter of most exquisite beauty; he determined to marry her if she came up to the description given of her; but unwilling to make any advances before he was satisfied that Fame had not unjustly celebrated her charms, he dispatched

Earl

Earl Ethelwold, his favourite and confidant, to judge of the truth of it. Ethelwold being arrived at the Earl her Father's, where the lovely Elfrida was kept secluded from the world, he no sooner cast his eyes on her than he became enamoured : his passion was so violent that, forgetting the commission in which he was employed, and the duty he owed his royal Master, it prompted him to conceal the purport of his journey, and to demand the fair maid for himself : his rank and station soon procured him the Earl's consent, and they were married in as private a manner as possible, after making the family believe that he had important reasons for keeping his marriage a secret. On his return to court he told the King, that he saw nothing extraordinary in Elfrida, and that he was amazed the world talked so much of her charms ; but that it probably arose from the great riches of her Father, to which she was more indebted for the fame of her beauty, than to her real desert. This report, which

which was not designed to inflame the King's passion, had the effect Ethelwold expected; and the disappointed Edgar laid aside all thoughts of his intended marriage. The Earl after some time, perceiving his royal Master had grown perfectly easy, and seemed to have forgot his former intentions, represented to him, that though the fortune of the Earl of Devonshire's daughter was beneath the acceptance of a King, yet it would enrich a subject; he therefore humbly desired leave to make his addresses to her. Edgar, who had now lost all inclination for Elfrida, very willingly granted his request, and even appeared well pleased that his favourite was likely to marry so advantageously. As soon as he had gained the King's consent he returned to the Earl of Devonshire's seat, and the wedding was solemnized publicly. But fearing that his Wife should appear too lovely in the eyes of the amorous King, he kept her under various pretences in the country, without suffering her to come to court. How cautious soever

Ethelwold

Ethelwold proceeded, it was not possible that his treachery should long be undiscovered. Favourites are particularly exposed to the censures of those that wish their ruin; and Edgar was at length informed of the whole truth. Nevertheless, he dissimulated his resentment till he could be satisfied, by a sight of the Lady, of the justice of the accusation. With this view he took occasion, under pretence of hunting, to go to that part of the kingdom where Elfrida was secreted; and when he approached the seat of his Favourite, told him, that as he was so near, he would call to see a Lady whom he had once heard so much praised. Ethelwold received this declaration with inexpressible horror, and endeavoured by every allowable method to divert the King from his purpose; but all his artifices were unavailing, and served only to confirm the King in his resolutions: the only indulgence he could obtain, was permission to go before on pretence of preparing for his Sovereign's reception. He no sooner arrived in his

Wife's presence, than throwing himself on his knees before her, he confessed the artifice he had made use of to obtain her, and imputed it to the excess of his love ; then telling her of the King's approach, he conjured her, by the sacred bands that joined them, to conceal her charms as much as possible from the King, whom he described as extremely susceptible of love. Elfrida promised to do as he desired ; but at the same time, yielding to the excitations of her inherent vanity, she determined to regulate her actions by its dictates : she accordingly displayed her beauties to such advantage, that the King could not preserve a heart, before prepossessed in their favour, from their bewitching influence. The moment he saw her he perceived how greatly his confidant had wronged him, and in the same instant determined to retaliate the injury, by making the lovely Elfrida his own : but the better to execute this design, he took care to conceal his emotions from her Husband ; to this end, with an air of indifference

indifference, he declared to him that he saw nothing uncommon in her charms. Ethelwold was overjoyed at this declaration, and the King took his leave of Elfrida with a seeming unconcern, though at the same time love and revenge filled his breast. Soon after Edgar ordered his Favourite into Northumberland, under pretence of negotiating some important concerns; but the unfortunate Earl lived not to return, being found dead in a forest through which he was to pass, and where it was supposed that he had been murdered by robbers. The people however were soon convinced of the real cause, when they saw that the King, instead of making enquiry after the murderers, was married to the Widow. Malmſbury ſays, that Edgar took Ethelwold into a wood under pretence of hunting, and there killed him with his lance. Elfrida, as an atonement for the part ſhe had acted, built a nunnery on the ſpot where her Huſband was ſlain.

Edgar died after a reign of sixteen years, leaving behind him a character of which it is difficult to form a proper estimation. By the Monks, to whom he was a great benefactor, it is drawn in the most exaggerating terms; they say he was to the English what Romulus was to the Romans; Cyrus to the Persians; Alexander to the Macedonians; Arfaces to the Persians; and Charlemagne to the French: but in this encomium great allowance must be made for the partiality of the Writers. It is however certain, that though there was a mixture of good and bad qualities in this Prince, yet his hereditary virtues preponderated.

His son Edward succeeded him, who with less merit, but if possible with greater devotion to Dunstan and his creatures, obtained the titles both of Saint and Martyr; notwithstanding which there is nothing worthy of record in this King's life, besides the tragical conclusion of it. As he was returning one day from the chase, happen-
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ing to pass by Corfe Castle, where Elfrida, his Mother-in-law, resided with her son Ethelred, he was induced by his natural courtesy to pay his respects to her. To this purpose he left his attendants, and rode up to the gate of the castle. Elfrida being informed that the King was approaching, ran to receive him, and earnestly intreated him to alight and refresh himself. But as Edward's design was only to pay her a compliment as he passed, he refused her invitation, and only desired a cup of wine to drink her health. Whether Elfrida had already formed a design to destroy the King, to make way for her Son to the throne, or whether the favourable opportunity which then presented itself inspired her with the thought, is unknown; but the young King had no sooner lifted the cup to his mouth, than one of her servants stabbed him in the back with a poniard. Perceiving himself wounded, Edward set spurs to his horse with design to regain his company; but unable from the loss of blood to keep his saddle, he fell to

the ground: to complete the catastrophe, his foot hanging in the stirrup, he was dragged for some miles in that situation, till his horse stopped at the door of a house by the road-side, where the corpse of the unhappy King was found mangled and torn, by some persons sent from the castle for that purpose, who had traced him by his blood. Elfrida, imagining she could conceal the horrid deed as it was only known to her domestics, ordered the body to be thrown into a well: but as *foul deeds will rise, though all the world o'erwhelm them*, it was found a few days after, and carried to Warham, from whence it was removed to Shaftsbury, and interred in the monastery founded by King Alfred.

Elfrida, willing to atone for this additional crime, founded two nunneries, one at Ambresbury, the other near Andover. This was the only atonement they then knew of, and was accepted by the Priests: it was not however sufficient to calm the
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mind of Elfrida, for, unable to enjoy any of the pleasures of life from the remorse which constantly harrowed her soul, she shut herself up in the last to do penance during the remainder of her days.

It is not easy to conjecture on what grounds this young Prince, who was only eighteen years old when he died, could deserve to be celebrated for a Saint, as his short reign afforded no extraordinary proofs of virtue or piety; or why he was esteemed a Martyr, unless he is supposed to have received his death-wound on account of his affection for the pious Dunstan and his worthy associates: from whatever cause it proceeded, his name has the honour of standing in the Roman Martyrology, with many others, who are equally entitled, by their submission to the bigotted Priests of those early ages, and that only, to a place in the list.

The ambitious views of Elfrida, prosecuted in this unwarrantable manner, were far from contributing to the happiness of her Son; for his reign was one continued scene of confusion and disquiet: a fresh body of Danes, under the command of Swein their King, renewed their attacks on this kingdom, and after a repetition of their usual depredations, got possession of the greatest part of it.

The character of Ethelred is so variously represented, that it is difficult to obtain a just one of him. Notwithstanding his courage was undoubted, yet by his tardiness in opposing the Danes he gained the appellation of the Unready; this tardiness however proceeded rather from the treachery of his principal Nobles, who either opposed his designs, or betrayed them to the enemy. He is also accused by the Monkish Historians, to whom he was not a friend, of drunkenness and lust, and represented as covetous, proud, cruel, and tyrannical; but Speed gives us a
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more favourable idea of him, and acquaints us with virtues that compensate in some degree for his failings. The laws which he enacted and enforced, even amidst the continual distraction of the state, are proofs that he deserved not all the censure bestowed on him; but he was unfortunate, and in that word is comprehended every crime.

His son Edmund, surnamed for the strength of his constitution Ironside, endeavoured by his valour and prudence to rescue his country out of the hands of its barbarous invaders; but before he could carry his designs into execution, he was cut off by one of his perfidious Nobles, and the whole island was obliged to acknowledge the sovereignty of Canute the Dane.

These were the immediate Successors of Alfred, the generality of whom supported the fame of their great Forefather, and imitated his virtues and glorious actions. During the reigns of that Prince and his Progeny,

Progeny, England seems to have reached a higher summit of domestic happiness and glory than it had ever enjoyed before, or in any period since, through so many successive administrations. Some great Monarchs have undoubtedly arisen, and, like comets, have given a temporary brightness to the kingdom, but this has not ensured a regular return of light from the same source; their Sons have seldom inherited their Fathers virtues or abilities, and the nation has again been involved in the gloom of imbecility or oppression. Even those of Alfred's Successors who degenerated most from him, gave proofs that they inherited a great share of his courage, and of his concern for the welfare of the people; whilst their faults chiefly arose from an evil too prevalent in all ages, the pernicious influence of bigotted enthusiastic Priests, to which the best disposed minds are most open. It is much to be lamented that Religion, the ornament of our nature, should ever be disgraced by superstition; the former is productive of manly virtues,

virtues, such as are beneficial to society; the latter yields only indolence and inactivity, perverting the heart from the pure institutions of uncorrupted Christianity to the observance of idle ceremonies, and the cruel suggestions of intemperate zeal: the one is ever conducive to order and happiness, the other the parent of confusion and misery. This was a weakness with which the noble mind of Alfred remained untainted, notwithstanding he was the Son of the bigotted Ethelwulph, and lived in so dark and superstitious an age: his natural good sense, improved by study, preserved him from the infection of those religious with whom he continually conversed; and though he appropriated so great a share of his time to his devotional duties, yet he never neglected an equally important concern—his subjects welfare. In fine, the Hero of my work appears to have been a standard, the nearer to which his Successors approached, the greater the degree of glory and unfeigned respect they acquired; nor has the
discriminating

discriminating eye of more improved ages been able to discover any blemishes in his character, or to lessen those excellencies which gained him uninterrupted encomiums from his Contemporaries.

Having been too concise in the preceding pages on the Customs, Manners, Language, and Coins of the Saxons, to avoid interrupting the narrative, I shall now make such additions as the limits of my work will allow.

The mode of succession to the Royalty, in all the kingdoms of the Saxons, was nearly the same as that which had previously prevailed among the Britons; it was truly hereditary and lineal. The elder line of the original parent regularly ascended the throne in preference to the younger; and the younger lines successively possessed it
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upon failure of the elder. This was the stated regulation for the descent of the crown. But there were some deviations from it; as on the death of Ethelred, the third son of Ethelwulph, when neither Athelm, or Ethelwald his Sons succeeded to the vacant Throne, but Alfred their uncle, the fourth Son of Ethelwulph, agreeable to his Father's will, succeeded his Brother, as before recited. If these deviations had been left unsettled by their laws, and determinable by the sole will of the Monarch, or the prevalent authority of a faction, the Saxon Government must be condemned as a wretched system of absurdity; but the exceptions are only few in number, and all previously ascertained by authoritative customs, or determined at the time by the concurrent suffrages of the King and Parliament. Thus, in the instance just mentioned, on the prospect of the impending ruin of West-Saxony from the invasions of the Danes, and with the design of inducing Alfred to exert all his abilities in the defence of the kingdom, Ethelred publicly confirmed the will of his
 Father

Father in favor of Alfred, to the detriment of his own Sons.

The revenue of the Saxon Kings was composed of various articles. The frequent incidents of Heriots and Reliefs made a considerable income of themselves; but to these were added the mulcts imposed for offences by the Courts, one third of which were regularly remitted to the royal treasury. These were occasionally increased by the three capital aids which were due to the King from his military tenants; one upon the first marriage of his eldest Daughter, another on the creation of his eldest Son a Knight; and a third for the redemption of his own person from captivity. The foregoing were only accidental; but the most considerable, and the only regular branch of the revenues of the crown, arose from the profits of its extensive demesnes, the duties of the King's own ports, the tolls of his boroughs, and the rents of his own lands.

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The constitution of the Saxon Parliaments (as before observed) has been greatly disputed among the Antiquarians. Some have asserted that the Commons, a body of men elected by, and representative of the People, were an essential branch of the Legislature; whilst others have denied it. But the further proofs I shall now bring, will confirm the decision made in the foregoing pages. Under the feudal system of England, the whole kingdom, and a single barony, were exactly the mirrors of each other; and the rights of the King over his feudatories were nothing more than the privileges of the feudatory over his vassals. If the Sovereign had a just claim to the heriots, the wardships, and the homage of his military tenants, the Barons had an equal one to the same incidents from their dependents. If the Monarch was impowered to require the personal attendance of his immediate subordinates in war, so was the Baron.

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From this view of the feudal polity, we see that royalty and barony were exactly modelled on the same principles, and invested with the same privileges. The Barons held a court in which all their vassals were obliged to attend; where he presided as the judge, and they assisted as the jury; but the vassals who attended were only the feudatories of the chief; that is, the mesne lords, or frank tenants that held immediately under him; they and they only were the members of the court; in their presence were the acts of it executed, and by their assent ratified. Such also in every particular was the Court or Parliament of the King: as the immediate dependents on the Baron were obliged by their tenures to attend the little parliament of the barony, the Barons were equally obliged by theirs to attend the Court-baron of the royalty: the former were impowered, under the direction of their lord, to make laws for the regulation of the barony, and the latter must have been privileged, under the controul of the Monarch, to make rules for the government

ment of the kingdom. The one judicature was called the Court of the Baron, the other was denominated the Court of the King. The real Members of the Parliament therefore appear, from the essential qualities of the feudal system, to have been merely the royal Thanes, or the immediate Feudatories of the Crown : these could only have been obliged by their tenure to attend upon the royal Court, and they only, therefore, could have been the genuine Constituents of the Parliament. The sub-feudatories of the kingdom could no more be obliged to do this, than they could have been required to perform the feudal services, or permitted to discharge their feudal payments directly to the Crown.

The royal Moot was held almost entirely for the trial of Causes, and the formation of Laws; these being the regular subjects of its deliberations : Taxes were only levelled occasionally by it; and when the Commons were afterwards admitted into the national

conventions, they were summoned merely for the fuller and readier assessment of the Taxes. The Baronial Parliaments were assembled twice in the year, the Royal One thrice; on Easter, Whitsuntide, and Christmas. When the Parliament was convened, the Sovereign acted as the Earl or the Sheriff in the county, or the Baron in the Manor-Court: he was the Speaker; he presided among them, and assisted at their deliberations; and the points that were submitted to their consideration were equally, as in the County and inferior Courts, not decided by a majority of voices, but determined by unanimous consent.

Many of the Saxon Barons possessing only an inconsiderable degree of affluence, their attendance at the royal Court, which was always esteemed a troublesome and expensive duty, was dispensed with; and a law was therefore enacted by the Saxon government, which made an estate of forty hides, or about nine thousand six hundred acres of land,

a requisite qualification for a Parliamentary. This was not a law of exclusion from a right, but only a rule of dispensation from a duty, made to accommodate those who could not support the expence of attendance. But after the Conquest, the greater Barons were summoned singly to Parliament, and absolutely obliged to attend: the lesser were cited collectively, and allowed to come, or permitted to stay away. The lesser, as well as the greater, received the denomination of Barons and of Knights; both which titles were feudal, and signified a soldier and a vassal. But when the law had drawn a line of distinction between the higher and lower Feudatories of the Crown, the former assumed commonly the denomination of Barons, and the latter received the appellation of Knights. This distinction appears to have prevailed in the days of Alfred, as Asser, his biographer, plainly marks the three great military orders of feudal society, in his account of the persons that formed the party at Selwood, with whom the King attacked and routed the

Danes. He says, he was attended by a few of his Nobles, and also by some Knights, and their vassals.

There were five ranks of men in the gradations of the Saxon polity; the Nobles, the Gentlemen, the Freeholders, the Villains, and the Slaves. The Thanes were not all nobles, only the royal ones or great feudatories were really so; the lesser Thanes or sub-feudatories formed a middle rank below the nobles. The upper rank of Freemen consisted of the lesser Thanes; and both the Traders and Ceorles, the free-soccagers of town and country, composed the latter. The Villains were the next order; and the Slaves the lowest class of all.

The Mansion of the Baron was the capital of the manor, and the imitative palace of the parish; in it the Lord exercised the most remarkable attribute of royalty, that of coining his own money. His house was the school of civility for all the gentlemen,

men, and the academy of arms for all his military tenants. The manners of the Baron, softened by his connexions with his brethren, and refined by his three annual attendances on his Sovereign, was the standard of politeness to all the Gentry below him, and softened the barbarism of their military dispositions. The Knights and Squires were his personal companions, engaged with him in the hour of diversion, and shared his moments of social gaiety. Their sons also, bred up with the young Baron, received their education with him, and with him were trained to arms. The Lord retained a body of military companions constantly about him, men possessed of no land, but under obligations of military service to him; these were termed Squires, the Escuyers of the Normans, and ranked immediately below the mesne Lords and Frank-tenants. The area of his mansion was used as a theatre of feigned war; and the Baron, his Knights and Squires, engaged by turns in the chivalrous manœuvres of the age. At other times

he went forth in the morning to the chace, and returned from it in the evening, accompanied by his Knights and Squires on their hunters, and attended by a retinue of Burgeffes, Yeomen, and Servants on foot. The feats of the field generally concluded with festivity in the Baron's hall; a festivity mingled with the excesses of intemperance, a vice peculiarly prevalent among the Saxons, and which they derived from their German ancestors.

The little palace of the parish was however at once small in its extent and mean in its appearance; and such were the mansions of all the Gentlemen in the kingdom. Indulging the vices of a social spirit, and expending their fortunes in a train of inelegant hospitality, the Saxon Lords were careless about the size or aspect of their houses. They were constructed merely of timber, built in a quadrangular form, inclosing a little area within, and consisted of a great hall and several small chambers. Nor was it till Al-
fred

fred set them the example, that any were built of more durable materials, or with greater conveniences.

With regard to their Marriages, when a Saxon gentleman paid his addresses to a lady, if she and her friends approved of the overture, the latter appointed a prolocutor or attorney, and commissioned him to settle the preliminaries in her and their name. The Forspreca (as he was termed) entered immediately into conference with the suitor and his friends, who formally avowed the proposal, and engaged in a joint stipulation to maintain her. The lover then signified the settlement that he intended to make her, of which among the Saxons there were two sorts; one, exactly similar to the modern, commencing only after the death of the husband, the other taking place immediately on the marriage, and was considered as a present for the wife's acceptance of him. Thus was the wife solemnly purchased by the husband, and actually considered as his bargain by the

law. In the most ancient body of institutes there is a provision made for the ratification of these mercantile transactions; which requires, that “if a man cheapened and purchased a maid, and the bargain was fair,” the agreement should be valid; but if there was any unfairness in the contract, that then “the woman should be carried back, and the man shall have his shot again.” And in another law, equally venerable for its antiquity, and equally curious for its simplicity, it is also provided, that “if a freeman lies with a freeman’s wife, the injurer shall be thus fined; That he shall purchase another wife for the injured with his own shot, and bring her to him.”

These important particulars being adjusted, and the future husband and his friends having covenanted to the performance of the conditions, the relations of the lady affianced her to him, and accepted his troth. The marriage was then celebrated in the manner of our present espousals, the woman being

presented to the man, and the priest invoking the blessing of Heaven on their union. The wife was allowed by the law to retain in her own possession, absolutely free from the controul of her husband, the keys of her own treasury, of her own chest, or of her own closet.

Divorces were permitted by the Saxons, at the pleasure of the parties, as they also were among the Britons. It however reflects great honour on the Saxons, that those ebullitions of animal passion, which even in this more civilized age frequently break out with so much violence, and destroy the fairest scenes of domestic happiness, were kept by them under strict controul. Adultery, when known among them, which was very seldom, was punished equally with murder; and even a breach of celibacy with great rigour.

It is difficult to ascertain the peculiar dresses of the Saxons: they were probably a mixed assemblage of their own original garments and of the Roman-British habits. Their
 exterior

exterior vestments covered the head, and fell down in a cloak-like form over the body, reaching only to the middle of the thigh. It carried a long flag on the outside; was ornamented in the Roman manner; frequently decorated with winding stripes, and coloured over with scarlet. Their stockings and breeches were made of linen, fastened above the knee by garters that were drawn twisting and worming about the thigh. The foot and adjoining part of the leg were sheathed in the British half-boot; which was sometimes made of leather, and sometimes of raw hides; they were laced to the leg by long straps, that lapped over the stockings, the breeches, and the gartering of both. They wore also gloves; an article of dress which seems to have been first introduced by the Romans, adopted by the Britons, and transmitted to the Saxons. Their shirts were of linen. They wore their hair short, and their beards were shaven. The hair of their Kings was dressed and ornamented with an expensive gaiety, unknown even to the

Queens

Queens of more modern ages; but evidently borrowed from the most effeminate of the Roman princes. Thus Athelstan had his yellow locks entwined with threads of gold, as the emperor Commodus wore his, all glittering with golden sprigs. The Saxons retained to the last, the rude custom they had received from the Britons, that of staining all the naked parts of their bodies with paint; making various incisions in their flesh, exactly in the British manner, and then dropping different dyes into the wounds. And, to complete the British figure, they wore bracelets on their arms, a chain about their necks, and a ring on their third finger. The two first were generally made of gold among the higher ranks, and the last was invariably so in all. The dress of the women was nearly the same, only they wore caps of linen; and in the Roman mode, which they adopted from the British ladies, they decorated themselves with bands, frequently made of gold, and bending in half-moons upon their heads.

As

As the Saxons were originally derived from the Celtæ, their language was originally Celtic. This they necessarily carried with them on their migration across the Rhine, and they as naturally retained it in their new possessions on the Elbe. But the Germans, a nation distinguished from the Celtæ both by the difference of their religion, and the dissimilarity of their language, had, previous to the days of Cæsar, invaded that ample continent, and subdued most of the colonies upon it. The German tribe, which particularly subdued the Saxons and Angles, seems plainly to have been the Jutes. Hence, on the invasion of Britain, the conquerors naturally communicated their language to the conquered, and the dialect of Germany was now first heard and for ever planted in this island. At the time the Saxons were over-run by the Jutes, the Jutish or German language naturally received a great number of Celtic words into it, and, in consequence of both, the English retains

tains to this day a large collection of Celtic terms.

All the Saxon letters being evidently Roman-British, it is reasonable to conclude, that when they were settled in the wilds of Germany, they were as much unacquainted with the mystery of letters as the Britons had been before the invasion of the Romans: they therefore could not, as supposed by many, introduce an alphabet with them into Britain: the letters which they afterwards used, and which now constitute the table of their alphabet, were adopted by them in this island. Their intermixture with the provincials instantly made them acquainted with the British characters.

When the natives of Italy and the arts of civility were transported together into Britain, the Roman Weights and Measures would naturally be brought over with them. The principal standard of weight among the Britons was at once borrowed and denominated

nated from the Roman Pondo; signifying, like that, a Pound either in weight or in money. The Roman Pound therefore was introduced by the conquerors, and used by the provincials; and the Saxons on their settlement in the country would naturally adopt it from them. That these invaders had no Measure before, is plain from their having no word of their own for a Pound; and they were obliged to borrow a word for the object, from the nation that gave them the idea. Nor had they Coins any more than Weights among them originally. Having thus adopted the Pound, the Saxons made it the Great Measure of Weight, and divided it into the integral parts we now term Ounces.

The Saxon Pound, like the Roman, was of two sorts, the Commercial and the Pecuniary. The Pecuniary Pound remained undisturbed in this country from the settlement of the Romans to the year 1496, the 12th of Henry the Seventh; when the in-

tercourse between the English and Flemings being very considerable, and the variation in their estimates of money inconvenient to both, the government by a positive law superseded the use of our ancient Pound, and introduced the Flemish Pound or Troy-weight in its stead. When the Romans relinquished the island, and left the legionary citizens settled hereditarily in their colonies, they took possession of the Roman mints in the country; and we may naturally suppose they continued the coinage at them. When the Saxons succeeded them in the provinces, and made themselves masters of their colonies, they took possession of the Roman mints, and doubtlessly proceeded in the work of coinage.

The

The following are the Coins that were current among the Saxons.

Gold Coins.		Grains Troy.		Saxon Money.	
The Mancus in its original value	—	—	54	went for	30 pence.
The Mancus at its reduced value in the reign of Athelstan	—	—	22½	—	12
The Ora or Aureus	—	—	22½	—	12
The Solidus or Shilling	—	—	22½	—	12
Silver Coins.					
The genuine Shilling in its original value	—	—	112	—	5
The genuine Shilling in its latter state	—	—	90	—	4
The Tremisses or Trimfa at first	—	—	90	—	4
The Tremissus or Trimfa afterwards	—	—	67	—	3
The Penny or latter Shot	—	—	22½	—	1
Coins probably Silver.					
The Hælfing or Halfpenny	—	—	11¼	—	
The Feorthling, Farthing, or original Shot	—	—	2½	—	
Copper or Brads Coin.					
Styca	—	—	—	—	Two to a Farthing.

Among

Among the German ancestors of the Saxons (whose customs we may suppose they retained, though with some variations as they grew more civilized) every man was obliged to manifest his valour, or he was branded with perpetual disgrace: for as it was a shame for the King or Leader to be overcome in battle, so was it an equal shame for his followers to abandon him; they being all bound by oath to support him in his expedition. Upon a youth's being admitted to bear arms, he was presented with a shield, as a sacred badge of his becoming an useful member of the community in general; and if, by any neglect or want of courage, he lost it in battle, he was branded with infamy, and debarred from being present at the public sacrifices. A singular custom prevailed among the generality of them of letting their hair and beards grow until they had slain an enemy; but after they had done their country service, or obtained spoils by slaughter, every one cut the hair from his forehead, thinking he had then paid the

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price of his birth, and was become worthy of his parents and his country; and none but such as were naturally timid and despicable would long continue without the privilege of cutting their hair, after they had attained to years of maturity. Also, every man was obliged to wear an iron ring about his neck, as a badge of his slavery, until by the slaughter of an enemy he was permitted to take it off. That they might obtain the assistance of their Gods in battle, they carried before their armies certain images and monuments taken from the Sacred Groves: and after the arrival of Woden, they used to engrave Runic characters upon their spears, as charms which would prevail on the Gods to assist them in the war; in return for which, their custom was, cruelly to select every tenth captive for a sacrifice before his unhallowed shrine. From this period to their arrival in Britain, a space of full three hundred years, we may naturally suppose a variety of alterations took place relative to
their

their warlike habits, weapons, military discipline, and savage customs.

The arms and warlike habits of the Saxons upon their establishment in this island, as appears from the delineations of them left by themselves, the only authority we can have recourse to, are as follow. Their foot soldiers seem to be divided into three classes; first, those who fought with long spears; secondly, those who chiefly fought with swords without spears; and lastly, those who fought both with swords and spears. The general habit of the first class is a tunic with sleeves, which reaches down to the knees, and fastened round the waist: in the most ancient delineations they seldom appear to have cloaks, which are very commonly added to their dress, as we reach nearer the end of the Saxon æra. They sometimes are represented with oval shields, large enough to cover the whole body, though they are frequently seen without them. There probably were two sorts of spearmen, one of them slightly armed, having only a spear suited

for skirmishes, and the other bearing shields for their defence in closer actions. The second class are the swordsmen, who, besides a large, long, two-edged sword, are usually seen with shields. The habit of the swordsman, like the spear-man, is a short tunic, with sleeves to the wrist; like them too, they have sometimes cloaks buckled on the right shoulder, though they are often drawn without. The last class do not so frequently occur; but the swords and spears they bear differ nothing from the former. The greater part of these soldiers appear to have their legs naked; but they wear shoes which seem to be black, made, without doubt, of strong leather, and bound round the instep: but in the drawings of later ages, besides these shoes, stockings are evidently to be seen, drawn to the middle of the leg. The helmets that they wear (though many are figured without any) appear to be nothing more than the skin of some animal sewed together, and the hairy side turned inwards. Their shields were generally of a middle
size,

fize, for the most part oval, and always convex, having frequently a point projecting from the middle. Though from some representations they appear to have bows and arrows, yet from the account given of the battle of Hastings by an ancient author, we may conclude they only used them for their pastimes. He says, that “ the Normans had the victory, especially by means of their wooden bows and arrows, which the English had not then in use.”

The habit of the King, when he went to war, seems to have been equally simple with those of his officers. Like them he wore a tunic, with sleeves down to his wrists, and fastened round his waist, from whence it descended to the knees; he also wore a cloak, which was buckled upon his right shoulder. His chief distinction was a crown which he constantly wore upon his head, and which answered the purpose of a helmet. His arms when he fought on foot were a sword and a shield; when he was on horseback he

had only a lance. But the arms themselves of the Saxon Kings and Nobles were often very rich and magnificent, the hilts of their swords curiously wrought with gold and studded with jewels; their shields and helmets were also elegantly ornamented and inlaid with gold and precious stones. The banners or ensigns also, that were borne before them in battle and on other occasions, were generally grand and magnificent. Hengest and Horfa, according to Vestergeran, had on their arrival from Germany a banner carried before them on which was curiously wrought the representation of a white horse. Anciently banners were (either from their being composed of some religious relick or from the representation which they were made to bear of holy things) held sacred, and much superstitious faith placed in them. Arthur the British King, when he fought the eighth battle against the Saxons, carried the image of Christ and the Virgin Mary on his shoulders,

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Their Tents were of a very plain and simple construction, being only lines stretched from the top of a strong pole and fastened to wooden hooks driven into the ground ; which were covered over with thick and strong cloth or leather : on the top was a roof or guard sloping either way, like the ridge of a house, to prevent the rain from entering. To some of them they had a door regularly cut, but others were entered into by pulling the covering aside each way.

The Fortifications of the Anglo-Saxons were different from those of the Romans. In forming their camps they raised the whole surface of their station above the common level of the earth, in the shape of a Keep (or low flat hill) ; and this hill, instead of banks of earth, which the Romans made use of, was surrounded by a strong thick wall, within which were built the stations of the soldiers ; without, a deep broad ditch was made round the whole work, and this

was encompassed with a strong vallum of earth, on which was built an exterior wall, turretted after the fashion of the Romans. The general form of the ground-work of these Saxon castles were round, though they often varied according to the nature and situation of the place where they were erected. From every remaining antiquity we find, that the walls of their fortifications were faced with square stones (both within and without) and the intermediate space between the facings filled with rough flint stones, mixed together with a strong and permanent cement.

The ancient Saxons were great sailors, living chiefly by their piracies and plunder; and the construction of their vessels was generally very slight. The first party that arrived in England came in three long ships, their number amounting, according to Verstegan, to nine thousand men, three thousand in each ship; but this is improbable, if not impossible,

impossible, unless their ships were built of different materials from those commonly used by the Saxons, as they are described by various authors. On their settlement in Britain they began to improve their navy from time to time; but it was not till the reign of Alfred that it made any formidable appearance; and yet soon after, the royal navy of Edgar amounted to three thousand six hundred ships.

From an illuminated manuscript of great antiquity, in the Cotton Library, we are able to describe with some certainty the construction of their vessels, in their improved state, when they were built of planks of wood and decked over. The stern is richly ornamented with a representation of the head and neck of a horse. Two long bars, like oars, appear at the stern for steering it, instead of a rudder. On the middle of the deck near the mast is erected the cabin, in form of a house, for the reception of passengers. The keel runs from the stern, still increasing in breadth,

breadth, to the prow or head; which gradually decreases to a point, for the more ready cutting the water in the ship's course. Over the prow is a projection which appears at first to be designed for running with great force against the enemy; but as in the delineation the end of the prow comes still further out, which would of course strike first and prevent the desired effect, we must suppose it was intended either for the convenient fastening of the rigging, or to hold the anchor. The sail, in the representation, being furled up, we cannot so well judge of the method used to fasten and work it while the ship was under way; but from its appearance we may conclude it was of very little use, except when the ship went before the wind. This seems to be a sailing vessel only, for there are no holes or places made for the using of oars. The length of the ship here represented does not bear the least proportion to the height; so that unless the breadth was more answerable, it would be impossible for it to weather up a side wind. But it is probable

probable that it ought to have been drawn longer : the illuminator being either confined by the breadth of the manuscript, or too little skilled in the knowledge of proportion to be thoroughly acquainted with his error. The Saxons were very magnificent in the appearances of their royal vessels : King Athelstan had one, which was presented him by Harold, King of Norway, whose head was wrought with gold ; the sails were purple, and the deck elegantly gilt all round with gold. Earl Goodwin, to appease the anger of Hardicanute, who accused him with being accessary to the murder of his brother, presented to him a ship, the head of which was richly made and wrought with gold ; as was also the rigging and furniture. It contained eighty soldiers, whose dress and arms were also ornamented with gold, and each of whom had a golden bracelet on either arm, weighing sixteen ounces : the helmets on their heads were also richly gilt with gold ; and round their waists each man had girded a rich sword, whose hilt was of massy gold ;
besides

besides which, each bore a Danish axe on his left shoulder, and in his right hand he held a lance. To these rich habiliments, another author adds a triple coat of mail wrought in gold, with a shield embossed with gold and ornamented with nails richly gilt.

The Saxons on their first arrival in Britain put a stop to all the trade which had existed to that time: the making themselves rich by any other means than by their swords, seems never to have entered the ideas of that people. After their armies were landed on the island we hear no more of their ships; and for two centuries they had but few vessels. The state of trade among them during this period was at a low ebb; for there was no commercial intercourse between them and the Britons; and it appears that London, the capital of the little kingdom of Essex, was the only port at which their foreign commerce was carried on. This place was resorted to by merchants of several nations, who came thither both by sea and land, on
account

account of trade: those that came by land were the native Saxons, who brought their goods with them, in order to exchange with the foreign merchants, who, for that purpose, crossed the sea from Gaul, and other parts of the continent.

In this manner it is probable their commerce was carried on, until the middle of the eighth century, about which time Offa mounted the throne of Mercia; when that great Prince encouraged his subjects to fit out ships, and to carry goods in their own bottoms to the continent: which he did with a view of raising a naval power to defend his dominions. This dawn of commerce was, however, soon over-clouded by the wars that followed in the heptarchy, occasioned by his ambitious attempts upon the territories of his neighbours. The other Princes, justly fearing his growing power, made application to Charlemagne, beseeching him to interpose his authority, and to command Offa to desist. The Emperor accordingly wrote
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to him ; but his letters not being regarded, a final stop was put to the trade which was carried on upon the continent between the foreign merchants and the Saxons, until such time as a good understanding was restored between the Emperor and Offa. After the death of this warlike Mercian Prince, the increase of ships was not attended to, and of course the trade fell back into its wonted channel until it was restored to greater glory by Alfred. Another hindrance to trade in general was the restraint laid on barterings and exchanges. By the laws of the Saxon Kings no bargain was permitted to be made without some principal person or chief magistrate being present and a witness to it. In the laws of Lothair, King of Kent, it was enacted, that if any Kentish Saxon should buy any thing at London, and bring it into Kent, he should have two or three honest men, or the King's portreeve, present at the bargain. The design of these laws was to regulate the terms of bartering, and to prevent all impositions and frauds ; besides, as few persons at that time

could write, such evidences might be produced, if any dispute should afterwards arise between the two parties. Though these laws were very good in themselves, and prevented any unfair dealing, they doubtless were a great hindrance to commerce, which must be carried on in a quick and uninterrupted manner. A great article of commerce among the Saxons was slaves; which custom of selling men and women was kept up even in Edward the Confessor's time, as we find it recorded, that Gith, wife of Goodwin Earl of Kent, greatly enriched herself by this sort of traffic. And the people of Bristol, we are told, were much addicted to such commerce till they were stopped from so barbarous a custom by the advice and entreaties of Wulffstan, bishop of Worcester, at the Norman conquest.

The illuminators and painters among the Saxons being entirely deficient in the knowledge of perspective, the different drawings left by them of their temples, houses, &c.

cannot

cannot by any means convey to us so good an idea of their buildings, as we could wish. On their first arrival, the minds of the Saxons were filled with war and destruction, and their thoughts too much engrossed with establishing for themselves a firm and lasting footing in the kingdom. In this early period the neatness and elegance of their structures were considerations of too trifling moment to be attended to by them; but after they had been some time settled in the realm, the arts began to flourish, and were carried, particularly by Alfred, to a much greater length than they had ever been before in Britain. The first church which was built on this island, was constructed with watlings or hurdles, interwoven with osiers or other pliable wood. The Saxons also in the early part of their establishment built chiefly with wood. Edwyn, the first Christian King of Northumberland, erected a small oratory of wood, wherein he was baptized; but afterwards began one on a much larger foundation, with stone; which included

cluded the first building. So Aldwine, Bishop of Durham, first built a small oratory of wreathen wands and hurdles, where the body of Saint Cuthbert was for a time deposited; but afterwards he caused a larger church of stone to be erected.

Their stone buildings were often beyond conception grand and magnificent; to complete which no labour or expence was spared. Robert de Swapham, an author of great antiquity, saw stones that composed the foundation of the church at Medishamstede, now called Peterborough, that was built by Peada, the first Christian King of Mercia, and destroyed by the Danes, as before related, which stones were so large, that eight yoke of oxen could scarcely move any one of them.

It was customary to build their churches, monasteries, &c. where the relicks of some saint had been found, or where it was reported he lived; over the tomb of some martyr, or where he had been put to death. The fa-

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mous chapel of Ina at Glaſtenbury, dedicated by him to Saint Peter and Saint Paul, is reported to have been built over the very ſpot on which formerly ſtood the cell of Joſeph of Arimathea. The amazing richneſs and grandeur of this building is ſcarcely to be conceived. Malmsbury gives us the following account of it : “ King Ina built alſo a chapel of gold and ſilver, with ornaments and vaſes of the ſame : for the conſtruction of the chapel 2680 pounds of ſilver ; the altar was made of 264 pounds of gold ; the cup with the patena was of 10 pounds of gold ; the cenſor of 8 pounds 20 mancis of gold ; the candleſticks of 12 pounds and half of ſilver ; the covers of the book of the Holy Goſpel 20 pounds 40 mancis of gold ; the veſſels for water and other veſſels for the altar of 17 pounds of gold ; the veſſel to waſh in of 8 pounds of gold, and that which contained the holy water of 20 pounds of ſilver ; the images of Chriſt and the bleſſed Virgin, together with thoſe of the twelve Apoſtles, of 175 pounds of ſilver and 38 pounds

pounds of gold. The pall for the altar, as also the sacred habits of the priests, were interwoven with gold, and richly ornamented with precious stones. The materials of which amazing structure, with the ornaments, amounted to upwards of 365 pounds of gold and 2887 pounds of silver."

Ethelbald, King of Mercia, being desirous to build the church at Croyland with stone, which had formerly been built by St. Guthlac of wood, found the ground so hollow and spongy, as to be unable to bear the weight of a stone building: to remedy this he caused vast piles of oak to be made, and driven down, with a large quantity of solid earth rammed about them, which was brought in little boats from the uplands nine miles distant; and by this means they completed a firm and solid foundation. I shall add to this account of their religious edifices Bede's description of the monastery built by Saint Cuthbert: "The building was round, four or five perches between wall and wall; the

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wall

wall in the outside was the height of a man, but within side it was higher, so made by the sinking a huge rock ; which was done to prevent the thoughts from rambling, by restraining the sight, and to keep the mind employed on holy matters, and heavenly contemplations. The wall was not made of square stone or bricks, nor cemented with mortar, but of rough unpolished stone, with turf dug up in the middle of the place, and banked on both sides of the stones all round. Some of the stones were so big that four men could hardly lift one of them. Within these walls he constructed two houses and a chapel, together with a room for common uses. The roof was made of unhewn timber, and thatched. Without the walls he had a large house, to receive those that should visit him ; and not far off a fountain, which served them with water."

It is not possible to give a perfect description of the domestic structures of the Anglo-Saxons, as well from the silence of historians
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on this particular, as from the improbability of meeting with any authentic remains of them. On their first arrival in Britain, their houses might be but rudely made of stakes and hurdles, thatched with reeds; yet on their establishment, among their various improvements, those in architecture were not neglected by them; for their churches, palaces, and public structures, we find, from miserable sheds of wood and twisted osiers, daubed over with clay, are easily traced on to grand and magnificent buildings of stone and bricks: we may from thence justly conclude, that their own habitations improved in proportion, till assisted by the genius of Alfred they became like their churches, grand and elegant,

The ancient Germans not only hated but held it a disgrace to till their lands, or provide by honest industry for the support of their lives: they committed the care of cultivating their lands to the old and feeble, whose decrepid age prevented their attendance

on the wars ; and also to their women. The only grain they valued was barley ; with which they made their drink ; but those who lived upon the banks of the Rhine had wine. On their settlement in Britain, more especially on the flourishing of Christianity, their minds became more polished and improved ; they then began industriously to manure and cultivate the ground, occupying of farms, sowing carefully their grain, and grazing and keeping of cattle. Their sheep also they sheered at the proper season, and dressed the wool, which, being first spun, they wove into clothing.

Though their principal grain was barley, yet they by no means neglected the proper cultivation of wheat ; of which their best bread was made : many however have supposed, that their bread was chiefly made of barley meal. Their barley drink, or ale, was held in great estimation by them. Some authors have asserted, that though they had wine, yet they did not grow it themselves,
neither

neither did they trouble themselves about the cultivation of vines or planting of vineyards: but it is certain that Probus, the Roman Emperor, gave the Britains permission to plant and cultivate vines; not only for their pleasure, but also for their use and profit: they consequently had wine of their own making, as had the Saxons in after-times. William of Malmſbury, ſpeaking of Glouceſterſhire, ſays, “ This county is alſo famous for its vineyards; the wines that are grown here have a tartneſs not at all unpleaſant, being little inferior in ſweetneſs to the French wines, for the grapes are ſweeter here than in any other county in England;” and Stow ſays, “ At Windſor Park, as well as in other parts of England, they grew vines, and made wine.” According to this writer, in thoſe early days there was but a ſmall part of the land cultivated for the growth of corn: he further tells us, that the Engliſh people might have been ſaid to be rather graziers than plowmen; for almoſt three parts of the kingdom were ſet apart for cattle.

The Saxons were great enemies to sloth ; those things that they had were such as was absolutely necessary to supply their natural wants, and not the least calculated for the encouragement of idleness and indulgence. Their beds were of a very simple construction, and appear from draughts extant to be nothing more than a thick boarded bottom, the covering very thin, and the pillows stiff and hard ; in short, from the view of the whole together, ease was but little considered.

The leisure hours of the women (even of the higher ranks) were spent in spinning, and such servile employments ; neither was it esteemed any dishonour for the lady of the house to be among her maids, helping them and performing the duties of the household in common with them, while the lord was with his men, assisting and overlooking them : many instances of which may be brought to prove the ancient simplicity and plainness of their manners. I shall only select one, which is the account given by Ingulphus

phus of Edgitha, Queen to Edward the Confessor: " I have often seen her (says he) while I was yet a boy, when my father was at the King's palace, and as I came from school; when I have met her, she would examine me in my learning, and from grammar she would proceed to logic, which she also understood, concluding with me in the most subtle argument; then causing one of her attendant maids to present me with three or four pieces of money, I was dismissed; being sent to the larder, where I was sure to get some eatables." Which plainness, adds Mr. Strutt, would but ill suit the refinement of this more polished age; this honest natural simplicity has been with scorn put forth, to make room for the insincere compliments and foolish fopperies of a giddy rival people.

Tacitus tells us of the old Saxons, that at their banquets their diet was rude, and when they sat down to table every man had a mess to himself: their drink was made of barley, corrupted (says he) into a likeness
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of wine, and their meats were simple, such as wild apples, fresh venison, curds and cream, &c. In almost all the Saxon delineations, where they are represented at meat, the table being decently covered with a clean cloth, we see that a cup of horn is given to every one, which may contain some pottage or soup, or their barley drink. At a table, the representation of which is given by Mr. Strutt, three noble personages are served by two attendants on their knees; there lies on it an oblong square dish or plate, together with a round one, on one of which appears a fish; there also stands a bowl, near which lies a large spoon or ladle; from whence it is not an unlikely conclusion to make, that the bowl itself is filled with broth or pottage. In another bowl there is the head of an animal, which seems to be that of a boar, dressed whole. And in a third, apples or some similar kind of fruit. It appears by many drawings, that the Anglo-Saxons chiefly boiled their meat. Having killed the animal, and cut it into pieces, it was put
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into a large kettle, which was set on a trivet of three legs over a fire made on the hearth: they stirred it, and took it out with a hook or fork which had two prongs. One of the figures sitting at the table seems going to drink, and is addressing himself to the figure next him, who appears to be answering him. This delineation confirms the antiquity of the custom of pledging each other when they drank, of which the manner was, that the person who was going to drink, asked any one of the company that sat next him, whether he would pledge him; on which he, answering that he would, held up his knife or sword to guard him whilst he drank; for while a man is drinking he necessarily is in an unguarded posture, exposed to the treacherous stroke of some hidden or secret enemy. This custom, as it is said, first took rise from the death of young King Edward, called the Martyr, who was traiterously stabbed in the back while he was drinking, by the orders of Elfrida his step-mother, as before related.

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We are told by most authors, that the northern nations were much addicted to hard drinking; which may be the reason that at their banquets they seem much better provided with drinking horns, than with plates and dishes. It was esteemed no disgrace among the ancient Germans for them to be sitting day and night, both carousing and drinking. And such great drinkers were the Danes, who were in England during the reign of Edgar, that by the advice of Dunstan, Archbishop of Canterbury, he suffered only one ale-house to be in a village or small town; and further ordained, that pins or nails should be fastened into the drinking cups and horns at stated distances, and whosoever drank beyond those marks at one draught, should be obnoxious to a severe punishment. Hardicanute is reported to have been so great a glutton, that he had his table furnished four times in the day, in a most costly manner,

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The Saxons made use of several musical instruments. Besides the horn and the trumpet they played on two flutes, like the Romans ; this they accompanied with a lyre of four strings, which was beat with a small instrument for that purpose : and to this music they danced. They also excelled in their performance on the harp ; by which means Alfred, as before related, got admission into the Danish camp. The same stratagem was some years afterwards retorted on the Saxons by Anlaf the Dane ; for, coming to their camp in the same disguise, he met with the same reception, and departed without molestation : but a soldier that had formerly served Anlaf knew him, and after his departure made it known to Athelstan. The King reproving the soldier for the neglect of his duty, in permitting so dangerous an enemy to escape, was thus answered by him :
 “ I once served Anlaf, and received his pay as a soldier ; I then gave him the same faith I have now done to you ; and if I had betrayed him, what trust could you have reposed

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in my truth? Let him die, if such be his fate, but not through my treachery; yet now he is escaped, secure yourself from danger, and remove your tent, lest he should assail you unawares." This spirited and honest answer of the soldier greatly recommended him to the King's favour. They accompanied the harp with the horn and violin; the strings of the latter were screwed up with four pegs set horizontally at the end of the nut. The organ was also used among the Saxons; for William of Malmfbury tells us, that Archbishop Dunstan erected one in the time of King Edgar at Glaftenbury, in honour of St. Adhelm.

The Saxons, Danes, with other northern nations, burned their dead in consequence of a law made by Woden, who enacted, that the dead should be burned, with all their moveables, especially their money; as those would be esteemed most welcome to the Gods that had the greatest quantity of treasure burnt with them. He also further ordained,

dained, that they should raise large heaps of earth over those that were slain in battle; and on the monuments of those who had performed any great and glorious actions, there should be erected high obelisks inscribed with the Runic characters.

Wormius gives the following account of the Danish funeral ceremonies, which he distinguishes into three ages: first, **Roisold Brendetiid** (the age of burning); this was when the defunct was brought out in the field, near to the highway, or to the estate that belonged to him while living; where they made an oblong place with great stones for the reception of the body, and there burnt it, collecting the ashes into an urn; round which they set great stones; then with sand, gravel, or earth they threw up a little hillock, in form of a mount. The second was called **Hoigold** or **Hoelstiid** (the age of burying); which was when the body was brought entire with its ornaments, and laid, unburnt, in the middle of a large circle of stones;

stones; then over it they, in the manner before-mentioned, raised a mount of earth, which mounts were sometimes plain, made only of earth, and cast up like a cone, and sometimes they were ornamented with a circle of stones; but this was only for their generals or great men. The third age was termed **Christendoms-Old**; which was when Christianity began to prevail, and they buried as we are wont to do at this time.

Tyrants, parricides, and other criminals among the Saxons, and all the northern nations, were denied both urns and tumuli; their bodies were burnt, and their ashes thrown into the air, or scattered into the river. But, on the contrary, no pains or labour were spared to enlarge and adorn the barrows of good men, and great heroes: they were often ornamented with immense stones, insomuch that it sometimes required three whole years to complete a single one. Harold, it is said, employed his whole

army, and a great number of oxen, in drawing one vast stone, to adorn the monument of his mother.

The barrows, here mentioned, are heaps of earth, thrown up, of different forms and sizes; and are of many kinds. They are for the most part sepulchral, for on opening them there are generally found either urns or coffins in those of the better sort; and in those which are ruder, instead of urns, the ashes or carcases of the defunct are laid in a cavern cut out of the solid earth for their reception; especially where the soil was of a chalky nature. They were generally built of such materials as were easiest come at; though it has been asserted, that they fetched them afar off, because the greater the distance from which they were brought, the more honourable was the funeral pile esteemed.

There are some instances of these barrows not being sepulchral; for Camden telling us of coals dug out of a hill in Northampton-

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shire, adds, Siculus Flaccus says, that either ashes, coals, or broken glass, together with bones half-burnt, lime, plaster, and mortar, were wont to be put under the land-marks or limits of the ancients. The barrows of loose stones or *karns* were not always funereal; for Giraldus, making mention of Harold's expedition into Wales, where that Prince ravaged the country so thoroughly that he scarcely left any alive behind him, he says; "In memory of which total defeat, he threw up many hillocks of stones, after the ancient custom, in those places where he obtained his victories, with pillars containing this inscription: *Hic fuit victor Haroldus.*"

Such rude barrows as are found with a hole simply cut in the earth, for the reception of the bones or ashes of the dead, and covered with a stone, or blocked up with stones, and having those barbarous chests called *kist-veans* on the top of them, or the *kist-vean* by itself without a barrow, are all most probably the rude sepulchral tombs of the

the ancient Britons; and this may be concluded, not only from their barbarous form and construction, but from the great difference between them and the monuments of any other nation in the known world. The *cromlech* or tables, with other monuments of that kind, may undoubtedly be attributed to the constructors of those stupendous works Stonehenge, Aubery, &c. which without doubt were also the works of the Britons. And these tables may have been the ancient monuments of their Kings and chief Druids, while the *kist-veans* and rude barrows were to perpetuate the fame of their Generals.

Those barrows that are found near the Roman ways or stations (for the Romans were forbid by the law of the twelve tables to bury in their cities or camps) which when opened are found to contain urns of fine earthen ware, or others more costly and of handsome workmanship, or if in these urns are found, with the ashes, instruments

of Roman construction, or Roman coin, such may without the least hesitation be attributed to that people. Besides these things, they sometimes put into their urns lamps, lachrymatories (small vessels filled with purchased tears) and other utensils of mourning.

There have been instances of finding a lamp still burning on opening some of their ancient sepulchral repositories. Camden tells us, that the tomb of Constantine was found at York, in the walls of the city; and that on opening it there was discovered a lamp still burning. The ancients (continued he) had the art of dissolving gold in a fat liquor, and so preparing it that it would, if undisturbed, burn for ages. Weaver also informs us, that at Coggeshall, in Essex, an urn was discovered by some labourers, and on the top of it was a Roman tile; which being taken off, a lamp was found burning; but that it soon extinguished on being exposed to the fresh air: with it was found a curious *patera*,

patera, or little dish, of fine red earth, on which was an inscription.

Combs, inlaid boxes, nippers, jewels, bracelets, &c. are often found in the urns of the women ; and also in the rude tombs of the Britons : when these are found in barrows they are likely to be either British or Saxon, because barrows were only erected for those who by their courage or valour had made themselves famous. Among the Britons, not only men but women often led their battles, or at least shared the common danger of the war with the men ; therefore it is but justly reasonable to suppose, that the same monuments should be erected for them as were set up in honour of the noblemen ; and that with them also, they burnt or buried their ornaments. So that those found in the rude tombs of the Britons, as above described, may be attributed certainly to them, and those found in urns in the more shapely and handsome barrows may be Saxon ; for we do not want instances of the courage

and resolution of the Saxon women. Seburgh, wife of Kenald, King of the West Saxons, took upon her the government of the kingdom on the death of her husband, acting with great spirit and resolution. And Ethelflida, the daughter of Alfred (whom Speed calls the English Zenobia) personally attended the wars, gaining many signal victories over her enemies. But when such trinkets are found in the burying grounds of the Romans, without barrows, or in fine and well-shaped urns, they are most likely to have belonged to that people. The best way of deciding such matters will be by the workmanship: the urns, &c. of the Romans, in general, exceeding those of our ancestors both in shape and elegance, and more particularly in the fineness of the clay. Roman urns have been also found of brass, some of glass, and others of porphyry.

It was common with both the Saxons and the Danes to bury with their dead knives, the heads of arrows and spears, swords, axes, and

and other implements of war: the axe is by many thought, though unjustly, to be Danish only. So also urns turned upside down are attributed to that people. Coins are very seldom found in the urns or tumuli of either the Saxons or the Danes.

After the establishment of Christianity among the Anglo-Saxons, they continued to bury ornaments with their dead. Their manner of burying was thus; having first washed the dead body it was clothed in a strait linen garment, or put into a bag or sack of linen; it was afterwards wrapped closely round from head to foot with a strong cloth wrapper; but it was customary with them to leave the head and shoulders of the corpse uncovered till the time of burial, that such relations and acquaintance, as were desirous so to do, might take a last view of their deceased friend. Before the body was put into the sepulchre the head and shoulders were also closely covered over with the wrapper. When it was brought to the tomb, it

was held by two persons, one at the head and the other at the feet, while the priest perfumed it with incense; then those two who held the corpse knelt down, and laid it into the grave; during which the attendant priest prayed over and blessed it.

The manner of preparing the body, and the funeral procession of the famous Wilfrid, Archbishop of York, who died at Oundle in Northamptonshire, A. D. 708, and was buried at Rippon in Yorkshire, are thus described by his historian Eddius: " Upon a certain day many abbots and clergy met those who conducted the corpse of the holy bishop in a large hearse, and earnestly begged they might be allowed to wash the sacred body, and dress it honourably, according to its dignity; and they obtained permission: then one of the abbots, named Bacula, spreading his surplice on the ground, the brethren deposited the holy body upon it, washed it with their own hands, dressed it in the pontifical habits, and then taking it up,
carried

carried it towards the appointed place, singing psalms and hymns in the fear of God. Having advanced a little, they again deposited the corpse, pitched a tent over it, bathed the sacred body in pure water, and dressed it in robes of fine linen, placed it in the hearse, and proceeded, singing psalms, towards the monastery of Rippon. When they approached the monastery, the whole family of it came out to meet them, bearing holy relicks : of all these there was hardly one who refrained from tears, and all raising their voices, and, joining in hymns and songs, they conducted the body into the church, which the holy bishop had built and dedicated to St. Peter, and there deposited it in the most solemn and honourable manner."

On the very first establishment of Christianity in this kingdom, it appears, that they buried chiefly without coffins ; the first used were either of wood or large chests of stone. Giraldus informs us, that Henry the Second caused the tomb of King Arthur, which was
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between two pillars at Glastonbury, to be opened; and therein his bones were found enclosed in a large tree made hollow. Before they had dug down to his coffin by nine feet, they found a large flat stone, on which was nailed a cross of lead, with this inscription: *Hic jacet sepultus inclitus Rex Arturius in insula Avalonia.* And by his side lay Guinever, his beautiful but incontinent queen, the golden traces of whose hair were yet undecayed.

Coffins of wood were however often used by our Anglo-Saxon ancestors; for Ceadda, according to Bede, was buried in a wooden coffin: he likewise informs us that Sexburga caused the body of her sister Etheldreda, the wife of Egfrid, King of the East-Angles, to be removed from an obscure place, where it lay in a coffin of wood, in order to place it in a fair tomb of white marble, procured for that purpose. Stone coffins are nevertheless of very ancient date also, and were used by them soon after their conversion to the

the Christian faith. St. Augustine was buried in the north portico of the church built in honour of St. Peter and St. Paul, not then finished or dedicated; and had an epitaph set on his tomb: in the same church were also entombed about the year 617 the bodies of Ethelbert and Bertha his queen; but it is not certain whether their tombs were of wood or stone.

Bede also tells us, that Sebba, King of the East-Saxons, was buried in St. Paul's, in a coffin of grey marble and a cover of the same; and from about the middle of the seventh century, stone coffins or chests seem to be had in frequent use, particularly among the richer sort of people. The coffin of Ethelred, surnamed the Unready, who was buried in St. Paul's in London, was seen by Speed before the destruction of that church; he thus describes it: "His bones yet remain in the north wall of the chancel, in a chest of grey marble, reared on four small pillars, and covered with a copped stone of the same."

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These coffins or chests, in which were deposited the remains of kings and noblemen, were not in general buried, but set into the walls of churches, or placed in such a manner without that the greater part of them may be seen. They often ornamented the covers of them with an image of the deceased, adding sometimes an epitaph in honour of him.

The custom of inscribing the tombs of great men is of very ancient date among our ancestors. The most ancient Saxon monument upon record, reared in this kingdom, is that of Horfa, brother to Hengist; which Bede tells us was remaining in his time, in the east part of Kent, with Horfa's name engraved thereon. The same author also informs us, that the Saxons used other ornaments to adorn the tombs of their great men. Over the tomb of Oswald, the great Christian hero, there was laid his standard, which was composed of purple and gold. Canute the Dane also gave a rich pall embroidered with

with the similitude of golden apples, elegantly set with pearls, to be laid over the tomb of Edmund Ironsides. Their royal monuments were very grand and magnificent. Alfred was buried under a tomb of precious porphyry. Nor was any cost spared in adorning the shrines of their saints and holy men. The body of St. Wendreda, a virgin, was brought by Efsinus, abbot of Ely, to that place, where it was laid in a rich shrine, most superbly ornamented with gold and precious stones.

Before the time of Christianity it was held unlawful to bury the dead within the cities; they used to carry them into the fields hard by, and there deposited them. Towards the end of the sixth century, Augustine obtained of King Ethelbert a temple of idols, in which that King used to worship before his conversion, and made a burying place of it: but St. Cuthbert afterwards obtained leave to have yards made to the churches,

churches, proper for the reception of the dead.

The small portion of learning that was known to the Saxons, was confined, till improved and rendered more extensive by the indefatigable Alfred, to the clergy and religious people : and the reason why learning was not more general among them was, not altogether from their own inattention to literature, but from the amazing scarcity of books : for Aldfred, King of Northumberland, was obliged to give an estate of eight hides of land to Benedict Biscop, abbot of Weremouth, for the purchase of one volume of Cosmography. The bargain was concluded by Benedict with the King, but his death happening soon after this agreement, the book was delivered to the King, and the estate received by Colfred the successor of Benedict. Whilst books were at this exorbitant price, none but kings, abbots, &c. could possibly become purchasers of them, let the genius of the people have been ever

so much inclined to study and learning. It is also said, that the materials necessary for writing were very dear, which was the chief reason why the people in general did not learn to write.

They had among their priests several very faithful historians, whose works since the invention of printing have been mostly given to the world. Among them the venerable Bede, as he was called by his countrymen, is much respected, and that with great justice. Eddius, Nennius, Aflerius, and Ethelward were all respectable authors, who laboured to illustrate and set forth the history of this their native kingdom and countrymen. Cædmon also was a very learned man, whose pious and godly zeal, Bede informs us, led him to translate the whole book of Genesis into the Saxon tongue; and to write concerning the origin of mankind, and the last judgment.

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The Anglo-Saxons, even after their conversion to Christianity, retained much of the superstitions of their ancestors, placing great faith in astrological predictions, &c. They however understood Astronomy, and have left several books written on the course of the planets, together with delineations of the solar system, the fabulous representations of the signs of the zodiac, and all those figures on the celestial globe now in use. This science they evidently borrowed from the Romans, on their conversion, from whence also flowed most of the arts which were afterwards cultivated amongst them.

They were not unacquainted with Botany, as may be seen by a curious manuscript written on that subject, with very good drawings (considering the time) of herbs, plants, &c.

Their sculptures and images are almost all lost or destroyed: so that there is no true judgment to be formed of them, unless it could be proved, that they were of a piece with

with the drawings and delineations in their manuscripts, which are exceedingly imperfect; it is however probable, that more genius was shewn and greater care bestowed on their elegant buildings and stately monuments; for though we find the manuscript delineations of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries very little superior to the Saxon ones in point of finishing, yet several of the monuments and buildings of that age are well worthy of notice, both for their exactness and delicacy of carving; and thus it might have been with those of the Anglo-Saxons.

As the arts and useful improvements first established by Alfred flourished, Luxury, the too sure attendant on them, increased. The Saxons were very fond of hot baths: in their laws the bathing in warm water was considered as one of the necessary requisites of life, while, on the other hand, they hated bathing in cold water; which, together with

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restraining from the hot bath, were often enjoined as penance for the faults they had committed. Those who would wish to be respected by the ladies were careful to bathe at least once a week. Long hair was much admired by the Saxon women, and the Danes, who in King Edgar's time were quartered in this island, by being particularly attentive to the combing and dressing their hair, captivated many of their hearts. This luxury of long hair (as it was then esteemed) was much inveighed and preached against by bishop Wulfstan.

The domestic employment of the Saxon ladies has been already mentioned. Weaving and needlework was much practised by them. We are told that a religious lady, desirous to embroider a sacerdotal robe, got St. Dunstan (then a young man) to draw the figure of it for her, which she formed with threads of gold. Nor is this the only instance of the kind; for the Saxon women were much
famed

famed for their knowledge of embroidery; and even the ladies of the highest rank thus employed their time. The four daughters of King Edward the Elder were highly praised and distinguished, on account of their great assiduity and skill in spinning, weaving, and needlework. The method of weaving, then in use, is somewhat explained by Adhelm, bishop of Sherburn: "It is not (says he) the single web of one simple colour that is pleasing to the eye; but it is one, that is with threads of purple and various other colours woven in with the shuttle, thrown from one side to the other, thereby forming a variety of different colours and figures, each in its own proper compartment, knit together with exquisite art."

These compendious extracts being all I can find room for, without exceeding the bounds I have prescribed myself, I beg leave to refer my readers, for a more enlarged account, to the Saxon period of Whitaker's

"History

"History of Manchester," and to Strutt's
 "View of the Manners and Customs of
 the ancient English;" where they will find
 their curiosity abundantly gratified, and re-
 ceive every necessary information relative to
 the people over whom Alfred reigned.



F I N I S.

